

Each year, we celebrate this special time which helps us to recall to mind our Christian life. We strive to get ready to welcome Christ, the Messiah who will come to us. That is why Advent each year is about the expectation of new light, new life, a new birth of Christ into our life. So we read the ancient readings from old Israel that speak of its longing for God's coming.

Today's first reading from Isaiah is the anguished outburst of a desperate people. Having exhausted all possible human alternatives, having given up on polite prayer to God, Isaiah cries out, "Why do you let us wander from your ways? Tear open the heavens and come down, with the mountains quaking before you as you do awesome deeds... all of us have become like unclean men, all of our good deeds are like rags."

Here, Isaiah cries out on behalf of a people whose lives are in ruin. "You're the potter, we are the clay. Come down and shape us up." It's an Old Testament prayer, the Old Testament prayer for a Savior. These words are similar in intensity to a poem by an Elizabethan poet, John Donne, who desperately needed God in his life. He felt separated from God because of his sins and shortcomings and impotent to reach God.

St. Paul writes to the Corinthians in today's second reading that the great intervention has come. Isaiah's prayer was answered. St. Paul tells the Corinthian Christians and us to reach out now to the gifts and graces of the Lord. "You lack no spiritual gift. He will strengthen you to the end. God has called you to fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ."

St. Paul is teaching us that so much is already within our reach. But we are like an audience watching a movie and not expecting anything of what we are seeing to really apply to us.

The great gifts of revival, renewal and transformation that we read about in the lives of the saints are available to us through the life of the Church.

The great promises of God are not for some specific people or group of people. They are for us but we can be asleep or blind to what God is ready to do in our life.

The Lord teaches us in today's Gospel reading to "Wake up and be on the watch." The Lord refers, of course, to His coming in glory. But His words can apply to the present, to the now. It's very easy for us to limit the coming of Christ to the past, as an event that happened so many years ago, or to the future when the Lord will come at the end of history and to ignore the ways the Lord comes to us today.

Each time Scripture is read, the Lord speaks to us as a Church and to each of us. Each time the Mass is celebrated, the Lord is present with His cleansing, redeeming love for the Church and for each of us. Each time we come to Holy Communion, He pledges eternal life to us who live the meaning of that Communion.

We don't have to scream out to the heavens for the Lord to come in power. He has come. We have now to open or reopen our minds and hearts to Christ to learn to watch for the signs of His special presence and will in our life.

This first Sunday of Advent is the start of the new Church year. Maybe it is a good time to make some spiritual resolutions as we prepare for Christmas.

As we light the candles of this Advent wreath each week, and as their light becomes stronger each week of Advent, the light of Christ will become stronger in our life because Advent is not about the rebirth of Christ. The Lord was born once and for all in Bethlehem 2000 years ago and will not be born there again. Advent is about the rebirth of our faith, the rebirth of our commitment to Christ and His Church.

The Lord did tear open the heavens and come down. He remains with us now through Word and Sacrament. Now, we have only to receive Him into our life.

Do not let Him approach your life and catch you asleep.

Advent calls us to watch for the movement of God in our life.