

Sunday Next Before Advent 2021  
Sermon – Saint Joseph Parish  
Father Craig Looney  
*Jeremiah 23.5-8 St. John 6.5-14*



It's that time again...time to get stirred up. In the Collect we ask God to stir up our wills, so that we always think and do the right thing and see the results of our good works. The Collect and lessons are linked to the Advent Season that begins next Sunday.

Today is the last Sunday in the Trinity Season...the long green season we are supposed to focus on spiritual growth. The *Book of Common Prayer* calls today the Sunday next before Advent. It's a very ancient title, going back to at least 1237 and the Sarum Liturgy, which became the standard for the Mass celebrated throughout most of England...and the basis for the *Book of Common Prayer*.

The original Latin opening words of the Collect...**excita...stir up**...refer to both God's power and our wills. Father Massey Shepherd, author of the *Oxford American Prayer Book Commentary*, points out God's power and our wills are not always synchronized...but they are connected. It is only by God's power actively working in and through us...the power of the Holy Spirit...that we are able to do good things and witness good results.

**Excita**...also means to **excite** or **arouse**...as in waking someone up from a sound sleep. What we're asking God for is to re-ignite...renew...refresh the power of his Holy Spirit within us so it burns brightly. Think about sitting by a fireplace. The wood burns and the fire is bright...then as the wood burns up...the fire is less bright. We put more wood in the fireplace and once again the fire burns bright.

We spent the first part of the Church Year from Advent Sunday until Ascension Day following the life of Jesus. We experienced the birth of the Church on Pentecost and opened up our hearts and minds to the Holy Spirit. We have spent the last part of the Church Year growing up, trying to live as people who love God. People who love God want to do what's best for others. Now is the time for us to check and see how we have been doing in the spiritual growth department! It's time for a spiritual recharge!

Jeremiah was a man who also wanted to do the right thing for the people and he wanted them to do the right thing. In 597 BC, Zedekiah, King of the Southern Kingdom of Judah, signed a pact with the King of Babylon and agreed to work for him. Jeremiah warned Zedekiah not to sign the pact...it would bring great hardship on the people. Zedekiah signed it anyway and almost immediately started to rebel against the King of Babylon. The result was disastrous. In 586 BC, the Babylonians overthrew Zedekiah and took most of the people into slavery. This was the end of the Southern Kingdom of Judah.

Jeremiah wrote to God's people who had been scattered to Babylon and other foreign countries not to be discouraged. He stirred up their wills...and there was hope! God's plan was to send a savior, who would be called **THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS**. He would put things right between God and his people. And he would be a descendant of the great King David. Jesus is the **RIGHTEOUS ONE** Jeremiah was talking about and it is his First Advent...his First Coming...we will soon celebrate.

Jesus always did what was best for others. That was God's will for him and he always acted in accordance with God's will. In the Gospel he has compassion on the people who had come to hear him speak. When he was through speaking...he didn't want the people to go away hungry. He took a few fish and some bread, said a blessing, and had his disciples pass the food out to the people. When everyone had eaten, the disciples collected twelve baskets of food left over.

The miracle of the loaves and fish shows us that Jesus is God because he has power over nature. And it shows us his great love for the people. He took care of their spiritual and physical needs...and made certain not one bit of the leftovers were wasted. There was plenty of food left...Jesus made certain no one was left out. We see the results of his good works...and he is only capable of doing good works.

It's now time to wake up...the Advent Alarm Clock has gone off. There's no time to waste. It's time to get stirred up!

