

Sunday Next Before Advent 2024

Sermon – Saint Joseph Parish

Father Craig Looney

Jeremiah 23.5-8 St. John 6.5-14

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This is the final Sunday in the long Trinity Season. The propers for the day are distinctly linked to the Advent Season, which commences next Sunday. This Sunday is also known by its popular nickname...“Stir up” Sunday...from the opening words of the Collect.

Father Massey Shepherd, author of *The Oxford American Prayer Book Commentary*, writes the opening words to the Collect, “Stir up” (in Latin, *excita*), refers to both God’s power and to man’s will. He goes on to say the fruit of Divine work and the fruit of our good works are not exactly the same thing, though there is certainly an intimate connection between them. We want to get our wills stirred up and excited because Jesus is coming, and we want to be ready to receive him.

This is also one of those rare Sundays the reading appointed for the Epistle comes from the Old Testament. 700 years before the birth of Jesus, Jeremiah was busy prophesying in the Southern Kingdom of Judah. His messages about God’s judgment were directed at the people during a time of great political and social turmoil, idolatry and moral decay.

There is a sense of urgency in Jeremiah’s messages. He reminds the people God loves them and wants what is best for them. The restoration of the special covenant the people had with God could only happen if they repented. Jeremiah tells the people to get ready. God was going to send a king who was a descendant of David, and his name would be “The Lord Our Salvation”. He would be the one who would put things right again between God and his people; he would bring them back from all over the world to live in their own land again.

Jeremiah’s prophecy was fulfilled in the birth of Jesus. The Advent Season is about preparing our hearts, minds and souls to receive him on Christmas Day. We need to pay attention to what Jeremiah says about God’s love for us. He wants what is best for us. God’s love is not an abstract idea or thought. It is an action. That means we have to take action. We express our love for God by coming back to him and loving others. And the land that we will live in when Jesus returns is called heaven!

God showed his love for the Jews by doing things for them, either directly, or through people like Moses, David, Isaiah, Jeremiah and others. We often experience God's love through the people we meet every day. Let's remember family and friends who have had positive influences in our lives and helped shape us into the people we are today. Let's ask ourselves how we can be Jeremiah's bring messages of hope to others. How are we going to take God's love and make it more than just a word...make it an action?

In the Gospel, Jesus shows his love for people by taking action and feeding a large crowd of people. First he asks Philip where they can buy food so everyone can eat. Philip replies 200 days wages wouldn't buy enough food to feed the crowd. Then Andrew said a boy had five loaves of bread and two small fish...again not enough to feed a crowd. Jesus is testing Philip and Andrew. He wants them to show they believe he can actually do something to feed the crowd.

Jesus fed the crowd and there were plenty of leftovers. They say leftovers after Thanksgiving Dinner are the best...there is some truth to that...we don't want to throw out good food. Saint John tells us Jesus instructed his disciples to gather up the leftover food so nothing was thrown away...twelve baskets were leftover. The number 12 in the Bible symbolizes God's power and authority over creation, including his power to set things right again when we mess up...and we do.

The Sunday Next Before Advent is the Church's New Year's Eve. We make resolutions at secular New Year's Eve celebrations to do better, to learn from the mistakes we made during the year, and promise not to repeat them. We need to make some resolutions of the spiritual kind through repentance and asking God to help us keep our spiritual lives in order as we prepare to welcome his Son, Jesus, on Christmas Day. We must also as part of our spiritual renewal and growth pray for peace in the world, our country, our state, our city, and most importantly...our hearts!

Stir up our wills, Lord! Get us excited about the work we are doing. Help us to be enthusiastic in telling others about the gift of your Son, Jesus, whose birth we will soon celebrate, and make the work we do truly pleasing to you and a reflection of your love for us and our love for others.

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