

The Journey of Advent Season

Our liturgical calendar offers several kinds of spiritual disciplines to help us to grow in our faith. I must say that, although our growth is never limited to these disciplines and that we should strive to grow every day; these disciplines become a good reminder or a wakeup call inviting us to be engaged in this process more rigorously.

One of those important disciplines is Advent season which is a 50-day period preceding Armenian Christmas which is always celebrated on January 6. Obviously, this journey tends to prepare us for the feast of Incarnation of our Lord or Christmas. Simply said, we are invited to put our spiritual house in order; be invigorated by the anticipation of welcoming into our lives our Lord Jesus who is the most precious gift we will ever receive in our lives.

What specifically is expected of us you may ask during this season? Following the Gospel readings of five Advent Sundays, our house cleaning task will be comprised of the following:

1. The realization that *“Life is more than food and body more than clothing”* (Luke 12:23). Amazingly, this message comes in the middle of eating and shopping season as Advent is a season extending from Thanksgiving to Christmas when we are heavily immersed into activities of preparing and eating Thanksgiving delicacies and Christmas shopping. Unfortunately, our society has programmed us such that we hardly find time to thank God at Thanksgiving but stuffing our stomachs and the day after be caught in the web of “Black Friday” shopping frenzy. Eating a thanksgiving dinner with our loved ones and shopping Christmas gifts gives us a wonderful spirit, but what is requested from us is not to neglect our spiritual needs and end up being a turkey-eating society or entering into Christmas where Jesus is absent.
2. *“If you do not repent you will all perish”* (Luke 13:3). This passage from the second Sunday’s Gospel is a stark reminder that we need to change our behaviors of satisfying only the body but seek to fill the void with presence of our Lord. By telling the parable of the fig tree, Jesus invites us to repent which is a serious practice of honestly seeing the wrong in our life and making an earnest effort of correcting it. If your life has to have a real meaning, Jesus needs to be present in you while you eat or while you shop. Jesus wants you to be the most precious gift to humanity in this sea-son of gift buying.
3. *“When you give a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed”* (Luke 14:13-14). The suggestion of charity is clearly amplified to us through this pas-sage. In this season of hope and anticipation we are called to be sensitive to the plight of the needy and the disadvantaged. Do not hoard the gifts; but instead give to others. The Christian thinking is that whatever you receive is good for living but whatever you give creates new life. This thinking becomes more vital especially in these economically austere times when

many people are unemployed or struggling to keep a roof over their heads. Stop and think; instead of buying two gifts for your loved one, buy one and donate the other if you want to experience a meaningful Christmas. We are all invited to the great banquet of our Lord; let's make sure that we do bring others alongside of us.

4. *"Increase our faith" (Luke 17:5)*. In this chapter when Jesus was talking to his disciples about the importance of forgiving and loving others, they turned and asked him to increase their faith, because as human beings they found it difficult to forgive or to love others just as we do in our times and in our societies. Those who are invited to the banquet of the Lord are called to be well conditioned and disposed in doing these humanly difficult tasks. The suggestion of the Gospel reading is, be what you are supposed to be; the hands and feet of our Lord. You have what it takes to put into motion your good will. Just activate even the smallest sliver of faith and see how far it will take you like the mustard seed which in time becomes a huge tree. But at the end be careful, do not boast for all you do but be a humble servant and say: *"We are all unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty"* (Luke 17:10).

5. *"Well done good servant!" (Luke 19:17)*. This is the only reward and the most precious gift which we will receive at the end. Jesus, by telling the parable of the talents is exhorting us to use our life and God-given capabilities wisely and efficiently in this season. If this Advent season would be a meaningful one, then we need to strive to put into good investment all our talents for the good of humanity instead of sitting back and doing nothing; be proactive instead of being stagnant and dormant. Stand up and see the star of Bethlehem leading all of us to the ultimate source of hope and salvation. To recap all the above, do not enter into Advent with a material blindfold. Find time to nurture your soul after buying yourself nice clothing on sale. The sooner the better; do not hesitate or procrastinate; turn to the Lord and let him enrich and empower you to feed the hungry and put a smile on the faces of those who are experiencing difficult times and start savoring the true meaning of Christmas.

Have a blessed Advent season always.