

## Homily for December 3, 2017, the First Sunday of Advent

We are not living in a particularly peaceful world, are we? And I wouldn't say that there *isn't* much turmoil or division among us. There are serious concerns about human rights in our world. There are millions of refugees. We have a broken immigration system in our own country. We are worried about nuclear arms in North Korea and other. There is discrimination and women are coming forward with all kinds of stories of sexual harassment. Many people are recovering from natural disasters in our world and many are struggling with severe poverty and sickness. Even with all of that, many are not coming to church. God is rarely spoken about in public life - and maybe not even in a lot of our homes. Some see sports as the new religion, what people do on Sundays.

And in the midst of that, here comes Advent! A time of new beginnings and a time of preparation. A time of remembering and a time of looking forward. Like Isaiah in the first reading, we give thanks and remember God's blessings upon us in the past. We prepare especially to celebrate the coming of Jesus Christ that first Christmas hundreds of years ago, like the people of Isaiah's time prepared to remember the great Exodus at their Passover. But because Advent also is a time of looking forward, we also consider what we are doing right now and how are we ready for the coming of the Lord again. Isaiah says, "*Why do you let us wander, O Lord, from your ways and harden our hearts so that we fear you not?*" As a human race we can seem to walk away from God rather than walk into God's love. We can deny his very existence.

Jesus told his disciples to be watchful and alert because lots of folks were falling asleep, were walking away from God. Isaiah had the same concern centuries before. We have the same concern today, centuries later. But an important difference between Isaiah's time and Jesus' time is that, through Jesus, we have been empowered to be awake and alert. We have been trusted to be the "*gatekeeper*" in the way we live our lives, pointing the way to God, to love, to justice and what is right.

Advent reminds us of all that. The lights on the houses that are slowly coming on around town shouldn't just be amusement to us. Each time we see them is an opportunity to ask, how am I light in the world? What do I need to do to prepare a place for the Lord in my life and in the world - in the way entrusted to

me. In the gospel parable Jesus says the man "*places his servants in charge, each with his own work*". Let us not turn this work into busyness and self-service but let us be watchful and open to every opportunity to be a sign of God's love in the world.