

HOMILY

The First Sunday of Advent

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Have you noticed that each year we begin the season of Advent focusing on Jesus' words about his second coming rather than his first? Jesus says in our lesson from the gospel regarding his return that we are to live in a spirit of watchfulness like children eagerly awaiting Christmas Day. We are awaiting the return of the Lord.

What exactly did Jesus teach about his return?

First of all, Jesus was insistent nobody knows when this climactic event will occur. The angels in heaven don't know even. Christ, himself, did not know. Someone asks, "When will Christ return? When will history come to a climax and a new world order—an order straight from God—be introduced?" The answer is: we don't know. The early Church thought it would be in their lifetime. It's been 2,000 years. Many ask, "Why does the Lord tarry?" We don't know. We should not be surprised at that. There is much in life that God has not revealed to us. We don't even know what tomorrow will bring.

I was reading recently about the tragedy of September 11. Have you even thought about those who could have been there that day but were not? One man was late because it was his turn to bring the doughnuts. One woman's alarm clock didn't go off. One missed to bus. One spilled food on her clothes at the last minute and had to take time to change. Another's car wouldn't start. And one person couldn't get a taxi. Perhaps the most amazing was the man who put on a new pair of shoes that morning and headed for work only to develop a blister on his foot on the way. Because he stopped at a drugstore to buy a band aid for his foot, he is alive today. We don't know what the next moment will bring.

Be careful how you invest in your life. We live in an uncertain world. Don't waste time listening to someone who has got it figured out when Christ will return. We don't know for certain what this evening will bring. Let it go. Trust God and let it go. Jesus was insistent nobody knows when his return will be. Rather than sitting around worrying about it, we need to focus on how Jesus wants us to live here and now. Today's message reminds us of two essential truths: One, the future is in God's hands, not ours; and two, we can trust God for the future.

The future is in God's hands, not ours. Some people are excited about the future. They see cures for cancer and all manner of diseases. They see human beings routinely living in good health one hundred, two hundred years or more.

The World Future Society released their forecast for the next 25 years a few months ago and some of those forecasts were upbeat. Their futurists predict that by the year 2025, the world will have a billion millionaires. That's a lot of wealthy people. I hope you're one of them. They also predict a new process to remove salt from seawater and make it drinkable at a much lower cost than thought possible. Advances in artificial intelligence, genetic engineering, nanotechnology, and robotics will improve every aspect of our lives.

But they also report that the threat of another Cold War with Russia or China, or both, could replace terrorism as the chief foreign concern of the United States. Also of deep concern is climate change with the disappearance of much of our biodiversity, widespread flooding and water replacing oil as the most precious commodity on the earth.

How much of this will occur? No one knows. But here's what we do know. The same God who sent a tiny babe 2000 years ago to redeem our world is the same God who holds the future. He's got the whole world in his hands. God loves his creation with a love that cannot be comprehended.

Here's what you and I need to do. Make good decisions about the future to the best of our ability and then trust God. The future is in God's hands, not ours. The century in which Jesus spoke these words were just as turbulent as ours. The times were dark, so dark that most Christians believed that Christ would return in their lifetime. But it was not meant to be. Instead, Jesus instructs his disciples to stay awake.

Are you making the most of the days God has given you? Someone has noted that the average American disposes of about 40.1 hours of leisure per week. Fifteen point two (15.2) hours are spent every week in front of the TV. If the same time were invested in walking, during one year, you could walk across America coast to coast.

There are two investments of time that pay the highest dividends. The first is the time we invest in our family and friends. It's a cold, cruel world out there. We need one another. The second is the time we spend with God. God is our primary resource for coping with an unknown future.

There is a haunting story of a man who was the lone survivor of a shipwreck. He washed up on a small uninhabited island. He cried out to God to save him and every day he scanned the horizon for help. But none came. Eventually, he built a small hut and put his few possessions in it. Then one day he arrived home to find his hut in flames, the smoke rolling up to the sky. He was angry and grief-stricken. Early the next day, though, a ship drew near the island and rescued him. "How did you know I was here?" he asked the crew? "We saw your smoke signal." We don't know the future, but God does. God will not forsake us. We are in God's eternal care.

As we prepare for this unknowable future, many of us are simply ignoring the most precious resource in our life—the presence of God in our lives. There is a basic pattern to life, a pattern God alone can see. Trust in God and seize the day

