

*"Come, let us climb the LORD's mountain, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may instruct us in his ways, and we may walk in his paths." (Isaiah 2:3)*

Dear Friends,

On this first week weekend of Advent, I wish all of you a blessed and holy season. The days ahead will be challenging for us if we are willing to grapple with the struggles that hold us back from being the people that God calls us to be. In my recent bulletin article, I suggested our theme for Advent be titled "Come to Jesus." This phrase is typically used in moments to relieve tension, usually to implore a family, friend, co-worker – someone we know well – to depart from a sinful path and return to a state of peace and grace. While this gesture of reconciliation might be used to humor and lighten the moment, it is no laughing matter; any need for healing in relationship with God or any human being cannot be postponed. The readings for Mass in the preceding weeks remind us over and over that the Lord is coming, and we must be prepared. The sense of urgency that He is coming soon reminds us that precious time is not to be wasted. Is this not most concretely expressed in the gospel reading that was just proclaimed: "So too, you also must be prepared, for at an hour you do not expect, the Son of Man will come" (Matthew 24:44). As this new liturgical year begins and we prepare to welcome the savior into the world by His birth and in anticipation of His second coming, let's do our part to meet him. Come to Jesus, my friends. It is the only way that will heal and save us.

The scriptures will provide an endless supply of perspectives in revealing the truth of the Catholic faith and ways that we are called to grow. They are the greatest medicine we can receive during this season of grace and should be at the heart of our Advent prayer routine, as well as any resolutions, should we choose to make them. If there are struggles or pain, fear not - that means growth is shaping our lives and is a sure sign we are starting to heal. If you have not been in the practice of attending daily Mass, I invite you to do so. And, if you have not had an opportunity to attend the Daytime Prayer/Office of Readings Service on Tuesday and Thursday, I encourage you to make this part of your Advent discipline. There are many parishioners who do not know this offering of prayer exists at our parish and, as an extension of the Eucharist, is yet another way to participate in the Paschal Mystery and waiting joyfully for the coming of the Savior.

Some may not be able to attend either the Mass or Liturgy of the Hours during Advent, but I ask you to consider making a pilgrimage to St. Mary's Church as part of your daily prayer routine. Sure, you can pray these readings at home, but there is something to be said about physically going to the House of the Lord in our parish and to meditate on the sacred mysteries in this holy place. There are many people besides parishioners, non-parishioners and visitors to the Corning area, who find the hours that the Church is open for prayer to be beneficial and inspirational. Even a 10-15 minute visit to spend time with the Lord in prayer will work wonders for the soul.

In addition to the scripture readings prescribed for Advent, you may wish to engage with a spiritual companion. This year, I will revisit the series of reflections by Saint John Cardinal Henry Newman that I used last year. His writing might be theologically dense, but a challenge to the mind is also good for growth in faith. Speaking of saints, this is the first opportunity I have

had to express great joy that Venerable Fulton J. Sheen will be Beatified on December 21. Bishop Sheen was appointed the Sixth bishop of the Diocese of Rochester in 1966, after serving as auxiliary bishop in the Archdiocese of New York for 15 years. His cause for canonization was opened in 2002 which simultaneously declared him 'Servant of God'. Named Venerable by Pope Benedict XVI in 2012, there was considerable controversy over his final resting place; though the situation was resolved earlier this year. In June, his remains were removed from the bishop's crypt at St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York City and reinterred at the Cathedral of St. Mary of the Immaculate Conception in Peoria, where his beatification will take place. Bishop Sheen embraced the modern media/technology that was available to him and engaged in television and radio broadcasts to evangelize the United States. His influence reaches far beyond the borders of our country, and his causes have been promoted all over the world. Sheens' writings enjoyed a renewed interest around the time I began my seminary studies and I found, and continue to view, his works as paramount to knowing the Catholic faith through both mind and heart. I know for a fact that some of our parishioners value his works, especially a companion for daily living (by the way, he has one for Advent as well!). Perhaps we can add soon-to-be Blessed Fulton Sheen along with Venerable Nelson Baker as our patrons for this Advent season, for their cause of sainthood to progress, and to pray to them as intercessors for our needs. This is one reason why the Church gives us saints – why not use it? By the way: the prayer cards for Msgr. Baker, as well as a booklet, are available in the entrances/exits of the Church.

I conclude by inviting you to review the Advent calendar that was included in our bulletin last week. This is the complete and comprehensive guide to all activities that are happening during this Advent season at All Saints. This includes opportunities for the Sacrament of Penance, adult and children's faith formation events, and a 'Lessons and Carols' service. These events will arrive quickly, so plan accordingly. While one of the blessings of the season is to enjoy the company of family and friends in festive gatherings, let's not forget or neglect to choose times we can spend in prayer and fellowship with each other. The first event is for our young people, who will make their first confession on Friday, December 6. They have been working hard to prepare an examination of conscience and are beginning to understand that sin can easily disguise itself. Sin is not always a literal disobeying of the commandments. It has dimensions that can creep in and tear us away from God. If young people can see the need to clean their soul before Christmas, adults should not resist the call to do the same. Please pray for and with them as they prepare for this important step in their life of faith.

Next week, I will include in my bulletin article a summary of the homilies I will deliver during Advent. These homilies, as you heard this week, will focus on the part of the Mass that binds together the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist: the offertory. So much happens at that point, yet I believe so little is understood. What better way to prepare for the Lord's coming than by understanding more deeply the sacrifice and offering He made for us?

As we begin this Advent season, I remain grateful to be your pastor.

God bless,

Fr. Jones