

Advent for the Second Coming of Christ First Sunday of Advent/C November 29, 2015
9:00 AM **Jer 33:14-16; 1 Thes 3:12—4:2; Lk 21:25-28, 34-36** (Creation history and salvation are still in play, and we do not know the outcome.)

Today on the First Sunday of Advent the Church focuses on something that you have heard about but probably never thought about: the Second Coming of Christ. **What does that mean, the Second Coming of Christ?** It's often mentioned in the Eucharistic Prayer. The very colorful language of the gospel may or may not go back to Jesus himself, probably not; it doesn't tell us much. It's part of a style of writing that was very popular at the time of early Christianity, but it doesn't tell us exactly what it's about. Now this question of the return of Christ has riven the Church, dividing whole communities over the centuries. So **it is something worth pondering, although ultimately we don't really know what it's about, just that there will be something coming.**

We are already two days into the craziest shopping period of the year, but in the beginning of Advent we do not focus in our Church on the first coming of Christ yet, because **the coming of God in the flesh, in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, was only a stage in a long process that we call salvation or redemption.** It is a process of God paying gracious attention to his creation, carefully guiding it in spite of the fact that the part of the creation that is responsible, capable of responding, is also free not to. And we have to keep that in mind. **Human beings are the ones addressed by the word of God. We are capable of responding or not.** So we have to be very clear about this. The first coming of Christ did not finish anything; there is no fulfillment yet. **Creation history and salvation are still in play, and we do not know the outcome.** The resurrection of Jesus from the dead is our assurance that those who believe in him will be saved, but the fate of the rest of the world remains unclear, and yet something that should concern us. **Jesus sent forth his followers** for what purpose? **To help the whole world on the path to salvation. That is the mission of his disciples. That is the mission of the Church,** so the fate of the world has to concern us.

Now whether we as Church will succeed is not assured; it is not clear. So therefore **the promised return of Christ has two possible outcomes**—two possible outcomes. **The first is that the world may come to faith, and the return of Christ may mean that all of us are filled with the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of godliness, of love, compassion, and fraternity, and we become Christ returned.** That is a very possible outcome. That's the one the saints have always opted for and worked for. But it could be something else. This joyous, happy outcome is **possible, but not assured.**

All people, as I mentioned before, have **free will** and they are capable of rejecting God and the gospel message. And although the wicked can change, they can turn to God, nothing can force them to. We have to keep this in mind: **nothing can force the wicked, the evil in our world, to change.** Some parents have learned this in a very sad personal way when their children break relations with them and refuse to come home, refuse to call. What is a parent to do when children won't call? Well, there's not much. You can't force your children to return; God cannot either. So the questions are: **Will God's enemies relent? Will the unjust repent? How will the world end, joyous homecoming or sad and pitiful reckoning?**

Advent is a time to remember three things

- **First, that the end will come**, probably not very soon. The earth has been around about 4 1/2 billion years; it will probably be around another 4 1/2 billion, but whether life exists on earth depends greatly on how we behave and what we do and how we act and how we treat others, because we can destroy ourselves.
- **Second, that that end will be glorious for those who love God.** “The eye have never seen, the ear has not heard, the mind cannot imagine what God has prepared for those who love him.” St. Paul said that in 1 Corinthians. We have to keep that in mind as well.
- **Third, our mission until the end is to include as many people as possible in that number of those who love God.** God’s way of using us in this mission is by equipping us with the very Spirit that anointed Jesus in his baptism. **We are given that very same Spirit.** We are given his very power. Jesus even said once—it seems like a terrible exaggeration—but he did say, “Greater things than I have done you shall do also.” What could he have meant by that? Well Advent is a good time to think about it. **When we are open to the Spirit, our hearts can catch fire, and that fire can move others, and that is God’s plan.** So although preparing for Christmas, the commemoration of the first coming of Christ, is a very good, holy, and noble thing, preparing for the Second Coming is even more crucial, and the welfare of many depends on it.