

Sunday Next Before Advent 2025

Sermon – Saint Joseph Parish

Father Craig Looney

Jeremiah 23.5-8 St. John 6.5-14



It's time for us to ask God to stir up our wills to do good works and witness the results...and send His Holy Spirit to energize us to do even more good works.

The Sunday Next before Advent is the last Sunday in the long Trinity Season. The opening words to the Collect..."Stir up" (in Latin, *excita*)...give today its popular nickname..."Stir up" Sunday. The Collect talks about God's power and our will. Father Massey Shepherd in the *Oxford American Prayer Book Commentary* writes, "The fruit of divine work and the fruit of our good works are not exactly the same thing, though there is certainly an intimate connection between them."

Most of us have been to secular New Year's Eve celebrations. Just before the clock strikes midnight, we say "good bye" to the Old Year, and make resolutions to try to do better in the New Year. We make promises to be kinder to others and get rid of old habits, replacing them with more positive actions.

The Sunday Next before Advent is in a way our Spiritual New Year's Eve. In the Collect we are asking God to get our wills "stirred up"..."excited", so they will more and more like His will. We want our Christian New Year's Eve resolution to be a life-long commitment of service to others. Next Sunday is Advent Sunday...the Church's "New Years' Day". The midnight clock to Advent Sunday is ticking away. Now is the time to put away old habits that interfere with our Spiritual lives...and start fresh and new...embracing the Light of Christ.

The Lesson from Jeremiah was written about 700 years before the birth of Jesus. In the Second Book of Kings, we read that Nebuchadnezzar the King of Babylon, appointed Zedekiah to be puppet king over Judah in 597 BC. Zedekiah's name means "The Lord our righteousness". He was anything but righteous. He encouraged people to behave badly. Jeremiah warned them they were only bringing destruction on themselves. When Zedekiah double-crossed Nebuchadnezzar, Jeremiah's prophecy came true. In 586 BC, Nebuchadnezzar sacked Jerusalem and the Southern kingdom of Judah fell. Father Massey calls Zedekiah the "last and sorry monarch" of Judah.

Jeremiah's prophecy is ultimately about hope and restoration. He wanted the people to know things were going to get better. God saw the mess they were in and he was going to send them a king who was a descendant of David, and his name would be "THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS". Jeremiah preached a message of hope about how much God loved his people and wanted what was best for them, in direct contrast to Zedekiah, who clearly didn't love his people and was only concerned about himself.

God's love for us is not an abstract idea or a nice thought; it is an action. Throughout human history, God has revealed his love for the people, through prophets, priests and kings like Moses, David, Isaiah, Jeremiah and others. We have modern-day prophets who show God's love for us through their actions. Getting our wills "stirred up" to be more like God's will, should lead us to take action and show God's love to others. We can have a decisive and positive impact on other people's lives.

Jesus reveals his love for people in what he does for them. In the Gospel, he took two small fish and five loaves of bread and multiplied them many times over, so no one would go home hungry. St. John tells us that Jesus then told his disciples to gather up the food that was left so that nothing would be thrown out. There were twelve baskets of food left. Twelve symbolizes perfect divine completion. God doesn't want anyone left out...there is room in the basket for everyone. Perhaps the people who witnessed this miracle recognized that Jesus was the one Jeremiah was talking about.

We are about to turn our attention toward the most important event in human history: the birth of Jesus on Christmas Day. It is God's direct interjection of himself into human history, as a baby in a manger, at a specific time, and in a specific location. It is God's love revealed to us in the flesh and blood of Jesus the baby, Jesus the King.

Our Spiritual News Year's Eve resolution is to ask God to stir up our wills...to get us excited about the work we are doing...to help us to be enthusiastic in telling others about the gift of His Son, Jesus, whose birth we will soon celebrate, and to make the work we do truly pleasing to Him and a reflection of just how much He loves us.

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