

IV Advent 2025

Sermon – Saint Joseph Parish

Father Craig Looney

Philippians 4.4-7 Saint John 1.19-28

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Always be joyful in the Lord, our friend Saint Paul tells us in the Epistle. He says it again, rejoice! Paul is saying we should rejoice at all times and in all circumstances, whether we are sad, happy, angry, confused, or even just plain tired. There shouldn't be a moment that goes by that we aren't giving thanks to the Lord for his love and care.

Paul goes on to say we should show a gentle attitude toward everyone, the Lord is coming soon. We shouldn't worry or be anxious for anything, but in our prayers ask God for what we need. The recent mass shootings of schoolchildren attending Mass at Annunciation Church in Minneapolis, and Jewish families celebrating Hanukkah (the Festival Lights) at Bondi beach in Sydney, Australia, should give us plenty of reasons to be worried and anxious. God gave us free will. We do know certain people choose to do evil instead of good, and inflict the most horrific amount of pain and death on the most vulnerable members of society. In spite of these tragedies, we find hope through faith in God's ultimate triumph over evil.

This leads us squarely back to the Advent Collect which has guided us through the Advent Season...God help us to throw away the works of darkness and put on the armor of light. The Advent Collect is a CALL TO ACTION...avoid the evil things of darkness and death...embrace the good things of light and life. Jesus is coming soon. It's later than we think...but it's not too late to make some changes in our lives.

In last week's Gospel from Matthew, John the Baptist sent some of his own disciples to ask Jesus if he was the One or should they be looking for someone else. This week's Gospel from John the Evangelist, also features John the Baptist. The Jewish authorities in Jerusalem sent some priests and their helpers to ask John the Baptist the same question...is he the One. John says his is not the Promised Messiah but his role is to be his public relations agent...to get people ready to receive him...the voice of someone shouting in the desert...to make a straight path for the Lord to travel. In other words...don't set up obstacles that interfere with God's love and compassion reaching out to us.

During the Advent Season we have been asking the same question about Jesus that John the Baptist asked..."Are you the One who should come to put us back into a right relationship with God...or should we look for someone else?" Jesus said, "John, take a look around." The answer was in the signs and actions of Jesus. Then Jesus said, "Those who have no doubt about me are happy."

So what do we think about Jesus? Do we really believe he is God's Son who came to save us? Do we really believe he has influenced the world and our personal lives? Simply stated...do we believe in Jesus...or should we be looking for someone else? Does it really matter what we believe about him? It matters a great deal what we believe about him...it also matters a great deal how we conduct ourselves.

Listen to what our friend Saint Paul says a bit later in his letter to the Philippians...

... "In conclusion, my brothers, fill your minds with those things that are good and that deserve praise; things that are true, noble, right, pure, lovely, and honorable. Put into practice what you learned from my words and my actions. And the God who gives us peace will be with you."

The Advent Collect, which we were supposed to be saying every day, calls us to turn away from darkness and walk toward light. Advent gives us the opportunity to do some serious reflection on our lives...where we are now and where we need to be. Our friend Saint Paul has given us practical advice on making our Advent Action Plan dynamic.

Advent is about last things first...death, judgment, heaven and hell. We can't avoid death...but it is our entrance to everlasting life. We can't avoid judgment...how we treat others does matter. Heaven is the place we will experience God's love forever. Hell is the total absence of God's compassion, mercy, and love...forever.

Our friend, Saint Paul, tells us we should be joyful in our union with the Lord at all times and in all places and in all circumstances. God has given each of us free will to choose good or evil. Advent is about leaving dark things behind and walking toward the Light that is Christ. The only sensible choice we can make is to do what is good and pleasing to God and welcome Jesus on Christmas Day.

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