

**The First Sunday in Advent**  
**November 29, 2020**

**The Lessons:** Isaiah 64:1-9  
 Psalm 80:1-7  
 1 Corinthians 1:3-9  
 Mark 13:24-37

**The Hymns:** # 332 (1,2,5) *Savior of the Nations, Come*  
 # 336 (1-4) *Lo! He comes with Clouds Descending*  
 # 348 (1,2,5) *The King Shall Come When Morning Dawns*

**The Collect:** Stir up Your power, O Lord, and come, that by Your protection we may be rescued from the threatening perils of our sins and saved by Your mighty deliverance; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, One God, now and forever. **Amen.**

**The Sermon:**  
 Advent Housework  
 Mark 13:33-37  
 1 Advent B

"Be on guard, keep awake; for you do not know when the time will come. It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his servants in charge, each with his work and commands the doorkeeper to stay awake. Therefore, stay awake – for you do not know when the master of the house will come in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or in the morning – lest he come suddenly and find you asleep. And what I say to you, I say to all: Stay awake!"

Dear friends in Christ,

It's only 27 days until Christmas, when we celebrate Jesus' coming as the Baby in Bethlehem, born to the Virgin Mary. That celebration will certainly look different this year. With the Covid virus an ever-present threat, Christmas shopping has been curtailed, caroling in the shopping centers and on the street corners will be gone, family gatherings will be kept to a minimum, even coming to church may be a challenge. With the Junior High and High Schools closed, there will be even more stress on families during this festive time – parents will have to come up with more creative ways to keep the kids busy. And, of course there will more housework than usual just because people are staying home more.

We are told that this year Christmas will not be Christmas as usual, with all the parties and presents and pageants. Even Santa Claus will have to curtail his activities. And maybe that's not all bad. Maybe we can remember Christmas for what it is meant to be, the coming of our Savior. At any rate, you've got 27 days to be prepared to celebrate Jesus' coming at Christmas. But there's a more urgent message to be heard on this first Sunday in Advent: you have an unknown number of days until Jesus returns in glory.

Now, if you don't make it through your "to do" list and December 25 finds you unprepared, you're still going to be okay on December 26. But if you're unprepared when Jesus returns in glory, then you're condemned for eternity. So as we begin this Advent season, Jesus speaks to us of being prepared for His coming in glory on the Last Day.

### I. Jesus' Advent in Glory

Jesus speaks the words in our text to Peter, James and John; and He compares the life of the Church until His return to—are you ready for this?—housework. The lord of the house goes away, and no one knows when he'll be back. But he will be back, and they'd better be ready for his return. So what are they supposed to do in the meantime? Before he leaves, the man gives his servants authority. It's specific authority: he gives them authority to do the tasks he's given them to do. Until he comes back, they're supposed to do their work around the house. If they continue in what he's given them, they don't need to fear his return.

That's the gist of the parable. The Church on earth is like the household. Jesus has gone away—ascended into heaven, but He's coming back. He declares that His people should be ready for His return. In the meantime, what should they be doing? They should be doing what Jesus has given them authority to do.

### 2. The Christian's "Housework"

So, what authority has Jesus given to His people? After all, He declares that all authority has been given to Him (Matt. 28:18), and even the wind and the seas obey Him. He could grant His people quite a bit of authority. However, keep in mind that the Lord entrusts different individuals with different tasks to do. For instance, it's not the job of the Church to wage wars or punish criminals: Jesus entrusts that task to civil rulers, whether or not they believe in Him. In fact, remember that when a man asked Jesus to divide an inheritance between him and his brother, Jesus responded that He was not there to be a judge or an arbitrator (Lk. 12:14). An even better example is this: when Jesus stood on trial before Pilate, Pilate asked, "Do You not know that I have power to crucify You, and power to release You" (Jn. 19:10)? Jesus answered, "You could have no power at all against Me unless it had been given you from above (Jn. 19:11). Do you see? Even though all authority was given to Jesus, He delegated certain powers to civil rulers and instructed them to make use of them; and because He gave them the authority, He refused to take over their station.

So, we therefore learn that the Church should do those things that Jesus has given her authority to do. Jesus has not given the Church the authority to punish criminals, rule society or levy taxes or assessments. St. Paul, in fact, writes in I Corinthians 9:18 that he would abuse his authority as an apostle if he demanded payment for the Gospel. To the disciples, however, Jesus did give authority over unclean spirits, sickness and disease when He sent them out to preach His kingdom in Matthew 10 (cf. Mt. 10:1ff).

So what has Jesus given you, dear brothers and sisters in Christ, authority to do? If you trace the word "authority" through the New Testament, you will see what Jesus gives you authority to do. And your faith will be very happy to hear this.

First of all, Jesus gives you the authority to be His child. St. John writes in the first chapter of his gospel: "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the [authority] to become children of God, to

those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (Jn. 1:12-13). That's quite the start! Jesus gives you authority to be His child—something you could not do on your own. You cannot say, "I choose to be born into this or that family." That's out of your hands. But Jesus has made you His beloved child by His sacrifice on the cross to redeem you. Only because of His death and resurrection, you have the authority to say, "I am God's beloved child." If He did not save you, bring you in, you would have no authority or right to say so. Because Jesus says so, you're a child of God. This, of course, takes place when you are baptized in the name of the Triune God. And as a child of God, you continue to be fed by the Lord's forgiving Word of Holy Absolution.

Then there's Hebrews 13:10: "We have an altar from which those who serve the tabernacle have no [authority] to eat." The text is speaking of Jesus' sacrifice of Himself on the cross, offering His body and shedding His blood. Once again, this declares to you that you have the authority by Jesus to be forgiven, to no longer be guilty for sin. And given the reference to eating in the text, one can't help think of the Lord's Supper. You have the authority to join Him in Holy Communion, to receive His body and blood for the forgiveness of sins. Not everyone has that right, but He gives that authority to you as His beloved child.

Do you see your "housework" so far? Do you see what the Lord of the household has given you to do until He returns? First and foremost, He gives you the authority to be forgiven! Daily, He desires that you repent of your sin and rejoice in the forgiveness He has won for you by His suffering and death on the cross. That is how you are prepared for His return in glory. That is how you watch. Be forgiven: your housework is really no work at all, because Jesus has done all the work by His life, death and resurrection.

Jesus gives you authority to be forgiven. It sounds strange, doesn't it? But consider this: the devil will always work to accuse you, telling you that you're much too sinful and guilty and unworthy to be forgiven by Jesus. You're no match for him, but the Lord is. And so you respond, "I know I am forgiven, because Jesus says He forgives me—and He gives me the authority to say so!" Against that, the devil has no response.

Now that we've been given so much, we have much to give. This brings us to another use of the word "authority": Jesus said, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." (Matt. 28:18-20). Now that Jesus has spoken forgiveness to us, He now gives us the authority to tell others. Therefore, as a Church we rejoice to teach all that He has commanded—to teach His Word. We delight to baptize in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. By that Word which we are privileged to proclaim that the Lord gives this same authority to be His children to others.

That's the authority that Jesus gives to the Church. It's sometimes called the Office of the Keys. It means that Jesus gives us the authority and the "peculiar church power...to forgive the sins of penitent sinners, but to retain the sins of the impenitent as long as they do not repent." Let us be clear: we are merely His instruments. It is He who does the work of forgiving.

This fits in with the first Sunday of Advent quite well. Who was prepared for the coming of Jesus in Bethlehem? Mary was. Joseph was. The shepherds were. Why? Because they heard God's Word and believed that Jesus was the Savior. Likewise, you hear God's Word and believe that your Savior will come again in glory. Believing and forgiven, you're prepared.

Be forgiven: that's your housework until the Lord returns. Now, do you have other responsibilities as well? Sure, because the Lord gives you other stations and other authorities. This takes us back to vocations again: if you're a parent, God gives you the authority to train your children. If you're an employee, He gives you the authority to serve your employer. If you're a student, He gives you authority to study the subject and respect your teacher. As a church member, you have the authority and privilege of supporting the proclamation of the Gospel which prepares for Jesus' return. These are other things that God has given you to do, and they're good things. Of course, non-Christians do these things, too: this means that, while they're good, they're not things that prepare you for Jesus' return.

Therefore, hear the Law which this text proclaims: do not be caught unprepared for Jesus' coming. If you persistently live in sin and do not repent, then woe to you: you are unprepared. If you take the need for forgiveness lightly and neglect the Lord's Word and Sacraments, then you are not going about the "housework" of being forgiven. You will be found sleeping: repent. Should you not support the Church's corporate housework of proclaiming the Gospel so that others are prepared for Jesus' return, examine yourself. Where priorities have gotten misplaced, repent. If you believe that you're too guilty to be forgiven, repent of that sin, too: your sins do not exceed Jesus' authority. He has more grace than you need. And should you believe that the Church should be about something else than proclaiming God's Word and dispensing His Sacraments, repent. There are other great things the Church could do...but none prepare you for the Final Judgment.

"Repent" gets used a lot in the paragraph, but your faith doesn't mind. Faith loves repentance, because confession of sin also includes the forgiveness of the Gospel. Because this is the Gospel which this text declares: Jesus has brought you into His household, and He is coming back in glory to deliver you to heaven. In the meantime, He gives you authority, authority to be forgiven and set free from the condemnation of sin. In a way, waiting for the Lord's return is like the next 27 days until Christmas: knowing that it is coming, you do what needs to be done. And in a way, waiting for the Lord's return is much different from all the household chores you will be doing for the next 27 days—different because the Lord has done all the work for your salvation, and your "housework" is not first to do, but to be: to be God's child and to be forgiven. He will return in glory, but you are prepared: because you are forgiven for all of your sins. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.