

**Msgr. Dennis Sheehan**  
**Homily Given on Sunday, November 30, 2003**  
**First Sunday of Advent - Liturgical Year C**

Today is our first Sunday encounter with Luke the Evangelist. Luke is one of the most beloved Gospels. After a year of Mark's rather austere, intense, and even violent world, Luke's world seems a kinder, gentler place. In Luke, there are lots and lots of dinner parties. In Luke, Jesus spends lots of time with his puzzled disciples, patiently teaching them with some of the most beautiful parables in all of scripture.

But – our first meeting with Luke today suggests we may have come on him in a rather rotten mood. I for one would prefer to spend this Advent peacefully waiting for the baby in the manger. I'd love a few weeks of Mass time as nothing more – and nothing less – than a time of quiet meditation and joyful hope.

Couldn't we just for this year leave aside the "being vigilant" and all that stuff about praying for the strength to avoid tribulations? Give us a break, St. Luke! Can't we just this year store the warnings, the prediction of fear and dismay?! Let's just focus on Mary, Joseph, Elizabeth, and Zechariah and the heavenly promise of Christmas. After all, St. Luke, it's been a pretty bad year in balance. We need a rest.

We've seen men and women on the news with faces that, to us, look too young for a senior prom even. But there they are halfway around the world, and some of them are dying – among a people we may never come to understand. We've watched friends and family members get laid off and look for a job...after a few months any job will do. We've watched helpless as they get older and a little more defeated with each passing day. We've heard priests accused of crimes too horrible to dwell on and seen bishops standing not in cathedrals but in courtrooms. We think...wouldn't it be nice just to spend a few weeks waiting for the baby and the manger?

Then we need to realize: this is Scripture we've just heard. This is God's inspired word. This is the ground of our faith. And that Word, filled as it is with warnings and omens and garish events, tells us something. Scripture, Luke the gentle Gospel author is not just in a bad mood. He reminds us that Advent is about more – much more, in fact – than a baby, a manger, and Bethlehem. Advent is preparation not just for the coming of a baby. Advent is also renewing our vision in faith of just how surprising God is. Advent is a powerful summons once again to see the unexpected ways in which God lives and moves in every aspect of our human experience. Advent calls our attention to what the mystery of Christmas really tells us – namely, that God has become one with us in every aspect of our lives.

So, granted it's easier to look to the babe and the manger than to look at the cross. Granted it's easier to picture Mary in hope than Mary receiving Christ from the foot of the cross. Granted it's easier to think of Jesus amid shepherds and friendly cattle than to think of what comes next.

But the fact is that God, who became one with us at Bethlehem, grew up. He didn't stay peaceful and secure. He reentered into a world filled with violence, teeming with exploitation and injustice. He lived in a sleazy, violent, self-indulgent world, and he challenged that world with the truth of God.

Jesus is not about nostalgia and light. Jesus is about reaching out to the afraid, the lost, the forgotten. Jesus is about God who comes to the little ones, the wounded, and the weeping – binds up their wounds and forgives their sins.

So, this Advent, we prepare and serve food to a community that embraces the homeless, the marginal, the forgotten. This Advent, we buy gifts as grown-up angels for families and children we will never see. Advent reminds us very much that Jesus is for adults and grown-up living.

Jesus talks today of violent omens and cosmic disturbances. Then he makes a connection we could miss. "Lift up your heads," he calls us, "your redemption is drawing near." Look the world in the face. Learn to see the world's turmoil as God's. By the grace of God, these worst of times can still hold the seeds of the best of times.

I believe, and you do too, that Jesus comes in power and glory in the midst of every difficult human situation. In fact, in the midst of adversity - the world's or our own - we learn that our credentials cannot save us, that our good salary cannot buy the kingdom of God, that government, insurance, and the Supreme Court's wisdom cannot save us. Only the Lord can do that. Sometimes, indeed it feels like the skies are shaking and the ground is trembling. Listen then again to Jesus: "When these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads. Your redemption is drawing near."

Sure, we look for Christmas. That's the easy part of Advent. But the Gospel part – the challenging part, the grace-filled adult part of Advent – is that Christ comes to us when the sky is shaking and the ground is trembling. Learn to see him then, he tells us, and you'll know your redemption is near. God is not helpless amid the ruins. God takes even the calamity of death and turns it to resurrection and eternal life. That's what we wait for in joyful Advent hope.

Blessed Advent to one and all.