



**HOPE IN THE FUTURE
THE FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT
(YEAR B)**



ADDITIONAL LITURGICAL RESOURCES

Background Notes as resource for the homily

The First Sunday of Advent is the cry of the Church for the coming of the Kingdom of God. As we prepare to remember how we first welcomed the birth of the Word of God, we long for the Second Coming of that Word, when the world will be remade and the Kingdom will be definitively established. In this time “between” the First and Second Comings of the Lord, our job is not just to wait, but to go out with joy proclaiming the Good News of the Kingdom of God. We work to build that kingdom wherever we can, nourished by our prayer and praise, working for justice, peace and charity. All our “work” in our parishes is, in a sense, eschatological – it is a proclamation of a better world, a richer kingdom, the Kingdom of God for which we long. *“To evangelize is to make the kingdom of God present in our world.”*¹

The first reading is the lament or confession of a people who have forgotten their mission: they have become like dry leaves, blown here and there by the wind of changing opinion. But even in Israel at that time there were those who were faithful to their calling, who still held out the hope of the coming of the Messiah, who could raise the cry to heaven “Come down!” These were the people who knew that they were like clay in the hand of the heavenly potter, who allowed themselves to be moulded and shaped as ministers of the Kingdom. This reminds us of Pope Francis’s words in *Evangelii Gaudium*, where he reminds us that all missionary activity in the Church comes first and foremost from the work of God’s grace: *“The salvation which God offers us is the work of his mercy. No human efforts, however good they may be, can enable us to merit so great a gift. God, by his sheer grace, draws us to himself and makes us one with him. He sends his Spirit into our hearts to make us his children, transforming us and enabling us to respond to his love by our lives. The Church is sent by Jesus Christ as the sacrament of the salvation offered by God. Through her evangelizing activity, she cooperates as an instrument of that divine grace which works unceasingly and inscrutably.”*² The first and most important prayer of all engaged in missionary activity is “Thy will be done!”

Saint Paul knew well what it was to be clay in the hands of the Divine Potter, as revealed in his advice to Timothy: *“In a large house there are utensils not only of gold and silver but also of wood and clay, some for special use, some for ordinary. All who cleanse themselves of the things I have mentioned will become special utensils, dedicated and useful to the owner of the house, ready for every good work.”*³ We are here, today, in our parishes because people before us and among us have become “special utensils” in God’s house – willing to be shaped by the Lord to be instruments of His Kingdom. We must give special thanks to all those who have, in Saint Paul’s words today, given of themselves so that *“the witness to Christ has indeed been strong among you, so that you will not be without any of the gifts of the Spirit while you are waiting for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed.”*

Pope Francis also echoes this thanksgiving: *“I feel tremendous gratitude to all those who are committed to working in and for the Church ... I must say first that the contribution of the Church in today’s world is enormous. The pain and the shame we feel at the sins of some members of the Church, and at our own, must never make us forget how many Christians are giving their lives in love. They help so many people to be healed or to die in peace in makeshift hospitals. They are present to those enslaved by different addictions in the poorest places on earth. They devote themselves to the education of children and young people. They take care of the elderly who have been forgotten by everyone else. They look for ways to communicate values in hostile environments. They are dedicated in many other ways to showing an immense love for humanity inspired by the God who became man. I am grateful for the beautiful example given to me by so many Christians who joyfully sacrifice their lives and their time. This witness comforts and sustains me in my own effort to overcome selfishness and to give more fully of myself.”*⁴ As we begin this year of “Recognising and Celebrating Welcome, Outreach and Engagement” we should take these words to heart.

Even as we give thanks for all that we have done and do for the building of God’s Kingdom, we must also remember the Advent warning against complacency: *“Be on your guard, stay awake!”* Jesus himself emphasises what we celebrate, when in the Gospel for this Sunday he uses the image of a householder who has gone away. In the master’s absence, *“the servants are left in charge, each with their own task.”* This is us, the Church, in the “between time”. Each of us has our own task, in which we must be awake and responsive. That task is our mission of building the Kingdom, but as Saint Paul reminds us elsewhere, we are all different, and there are so many tasks entrusted to us as God’s servants: *“Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone.”*⁵

This Sunday, we see our parish as the household of the Lord, and ourselves as his servants awaiting his return. We give thanks for all those who have enriched our parish in the past, and do so today. At the same time, we rouse ourselves, we awaken our sense of service, so that we may not be *“without the gifts of the Spirit while we are waiting for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed.”*

¹ Evangelii Gaudium 176

² EG 112

³ 2 Timothy 2:20-21

⁴ EG 76

⁵ 1 Corinthians 12:4-6

