

If I were to guess, I would say most of us know how many shopping days are left before Christmas...But, *if you listened carefully*...there was not a single reference to “shopping days” in today’s readings.

Others of us may be waiting in *anxious anticipation*...to see which bowl game our favorite college football team will be invited to as the *end of the season* approaches. (My team will not be invited again this year.) ...Still others are focused on meeting with our advisors in order to minimize our tax burden *as 2015 draws to a close*.

The world is focused on the ‘*end*’... on *wrapping things up*. And isn’t it ironic that when our world is looking one way, our Church tells us to look the other way. *Today, we focus on the beginning*...the *beginning* of our liturgical year! This is *a time of new beginnings*, of *fresh starts*...it’s the time to look at our spiritual compass and evaluate *if it really is* pointing “True” North.

During the first two weeks of Advent, we focus not on the birth of Our Savior in Bethlehem, but rather on Christ’s second coming. St. Paul’s letter to the Thessalonians, today’s 2<sup>nd</sup> reading, was written in the year 51 A.D... not even twenty (20) years after Our Lord’s Ascension. *This* was the 1<sup>st</sup> letter of the New Testament. Then, as now, no one knows when Christ’s 2<sup>nd</sup> coming will occur, but Christians at that time believed the *2<sup>nd</sup> coming was imminent*, perhaps next month, or next year, but certainly during their lifetime.

You can sense the determination in St. Paul’s plea, where he “...earnestly ask(s) and exhort(s) you in the Lord Jesus (to) conduct yourselves to please God and... (to) do so even more.” (1 Thessalonians 4:1)

Recall our Gospel from two (2) weeks ago, when St. Mark tells us...“But of that day or hour, no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only

the Father." (Mark 13:32) So, Jesus did not know when the end of time will come, and neither do I. *But this, I do know...**We have one less day today than we had yesterday!*** So I encourage you to *hold* the understanding of the Church! **Embrace** this season of joyful preparation!

You may be asking, "How do I best do that?" ...and of course, as with so much that is good and holy, we look to the saints. St. Maximilian Kolbe as we know, asked to trade places with a fellow prisoner chosen for the death sentence at Auschwitz when his fellow prisoner cried out in despair, "...*my poor wife, my poor children. I shall never see them again.*" St. Maximilian was not focused **on the end** of his life, but rather **on a new beginning** for his fellow man...an act of love that served to testify to Our Savior's command to "*Love your neighbor as yourself.*"

Another saint we look to is St. Padre Pio, for whom I have a particularly strong affection. Padre Pio was a holy priest given the gift of the stigmata, and was known to be an exceptional confessor. My affection for Padre Pio began many years ago, prior to his canonization when my father told me when he was in Italy during World War II, he went to San Giovanni Rotondo, and sought forgiveness of his sins through the priestly office of Padre Pio.

For, you see, even though my father and the hundreds of other penitents standing in line that day were living the tragedy of war, they **were not looking at the end**...they too sought **a new beginning**...and that is what Advent is all about – **a time of new beginnings!** **A time to forgive and a time to seek forgiveness**, a time to humble ourselves before God in of the Sacrament of Reconciliation!

Jeremiah in today's 1<sup>st</sup> reading speaks **of reassurance**. A time when God comes to **fulfill His promises** and **provide for those faithful to Him**. St. Paul in his letter to the Thessalonians tells us **God invites us to a life of joy with the saints**. St.

Luke, in our Gospel instructs us to “...*stand erect and raise our heads because our redemption is at hand!*” (Luke 21:28)

The message of Advent is *not* one of *waiting for God to come with a sense of dread and worry*, but rather *with a lively hope*. Think of the hope of new parents waiting to hear their new born baby’s first cry! *That is our hope! The beginning of a new day! It is a day more beautiful than we ever could have imagined.*

Which of our *vices* will we *reject* this Advent season? Which of our *virtues* will we *embrace*? *What will we do to experience the beginning of this new day? A day more beautiful than we ever could have imagined.*

For those of us who embrace the Advent season...*while we will still approach Our Lord with empty hands...we are better prepared to meet Him, because He will be strangers no longer.*

I do not know how much time we have to prepare, but this I know...*We have one less day today... than we had yesterday!*

*St. Maximilian Kolbe – Pray for us!*

*St. Padre Pio – Pray for us!*