

- We don't know much about St. Dismas, save the fact that his dissipated life of crime and sin ended well. In case you're wondering who St. Dismas is, we generally refer to him as "the good thief," the man crucified with Jesus who repented as he was dying.
- Whatever his crime was that merited death by crucifixion, and whatever sinful life Dismas lived, at least at the very end of his life when it mattered most, Dismas found the humility to repent and ask for mercy.
- The sight of seeing an innocent man unjustly crucified alongside him, as well as those long hours of hanging on the cross, must have shaken the conscience of St. Dismas such that he rebuked the temerity of the other thief and was able to say to our Lord, "Jesus, remember me when You come into Your kingdom." (Luke 23:42)
- Though he presumably had lived a bad life, though he was a criminal sentenced to death by crucifixion, this sinner became a saint in the last moment of his life – proving that it's never too late to convert. It's never too late to change.
- God needs very little time to make saints of us.
- As we come into this 4<sup>th</sup> and final Sunday of Advent, our *introit* for today's Mass reads: "Drop down dew from above, you heavens, and let the clouds rain down the Just One; let the earth be opened and bring forth a Savior."
- It is a plea to our Lord to come quickly and not delay; yet it is also the hope-filled expression of faith that our Lord will indeed come to save us.
- Jesus is the Just One Who shall descend from Heaven like rain from the clouds. And through Blessed Mary, ever virgin, the earth will indeed bring forth our Savior in the great mystery of the Incarnation, which finds its fulfillment with our Lord's birth.
- The hopeful expectation that has been permeating our Advent liturgies these past several weeks is now reaching its crescendo this final Sunday before the great and glorious feast of Christmas! Christmas is very near, which means Christ's coming is imminent!
- While most of us are probably close to being ready for Christmas by having our homes decorated, our gifts purchased, and our Christmas cards mailed, we must now ask ourselves if we are spiritually prepared for this great feast.
- In other words, are we prepared to receive the Christ child anew in our hearts, and are we prepared to greet our Lord when He comes again in glory at the end of time?
- Are we prepared to face our Lord?
- Spiritually speaking, the great feast of Christmas should, in some ways, be an annual dress rehearsal for that moment when we will come face to face with Christ.
- And Advent is a metaphor for our earthly lives, which should be spent in preparation for our ultimate meeting with God.
- So, we must ask ourselves: how have I spent this Advent? Have I spent this Advent in prayer and penance? Have I made time for silence and adoration? Have I made an accounting for my sins and gone to confession?
- Or have I allowed myself to be swept up into secular celebrations to the detriment of my spiritual life? Have I spent more time in prayer or more of my time on shopping?
- While most of us love this time of year, Advent can be the most difficult time of year to maintain our spiritual lives because of the demands and distractions of the holiday season. It can be easy to lose ourselves in the enticements of secular "holiday cheer."

- Yet, remember what I said just a moment ago: Advent is a metaphor for our earthly lives, which should be spent, at least generally speaking, in preparation for our judgment.
- This doesn't mean we can't enjoy the celebrations this time of year invariably brings. But it does mean we need to keep our focus on Christ.
- And just as we mustn't allow ourselves to be carried away by the distractions of this beautiful time of year to the detriment of our spiritual preparations for Christmas, we must also be diligent and disciplined about the practice of the Faith throughout our lives, for we know not when we will have to face our Lord in judgment.
- So, if you've found that you've frittered away your Advent so far and haven't really made time for silence and prayer, the good news is that it's not too late to change. We still have 6 days left before Christmas!
- While it's never a good plan to wait until the last moment to prepare for anything, most especially your salvation, our blessed Lord is always ready to receive us when we turn to Him in prayer and repentance. He always blesses what time we give to Him.
- As the story of St. Dismas shows us, our Lord gives us the chance to turn back to Him with contrition and to ask for His mercy until that very last moment before our soul separates from our body and we are brought to His judgment throne.
- For He wants us for Himself. Christ desires our salvation – and He'll do anything to procure it. That's the way of God's mercy. But let us not forget that we must never presume upon God's mercy by purposely delaying our conversion.
- So, as we make our way through these final days before the coming of our Lord at Christmas, let us set aside the secular elements of this time of year and focus on what's truly important: our Lord and how we will appear before Him on that last day.
- Like Our Lady and St. Joseph, may we make time for silent meditation on the great mysteries that will soon unfold before us.
- And may we follow the advice of St. John the Baptist to make straight the ways of the Lord by amending our lives of whatever is displeasing to God, so that we might leap for joy when our Lord comes.
- God needs very little time to make saints of us. We just must give God whatever time we have left.
- St. Dismas, pray for us.