

- Many years ago I had the opportunity to see the Shroud of Turin in person. For those of you unfamiliar with the Shroud of Turin, it's one of the Church's greatest treasures because it's the burial cloth that Jesus was wrapped in when He was laid in the tomb.
 - Miraculously, the Shroud of Turin bears Christ's image. The theory is that when Jesus resurrected from the dead, the bright light that His body emitted left His image indelibly printed upon the cloth, much like a photo negative.
 - As you look at the cloth, you can see not only Christ's face and body, but His wounds as well: in His hands, His feet, from the crown of thorns, from the centurion's lance that pierced His side, and from the beatings and scourging He endured.
 - If you are a person of faith, you cannot help but be moved by seeing the Shroud of Turin. In fact, my first inclination upon seeing the Shroud up close was to beg our Lord for forgiveness for my sins and those of the whole world.
 - Truly, nothing has ever stirred contrition within me like seeing the Shroud. That's because when you see the Shroud, you get a very clear sense of all that Jesus suffered in His Passion and death – all that He suffered *for* us and *because* of us.
 - Thus, seeing the Shroud of Turin up close helped me understand more deeply Christ's great love for us, and in turn, it inflamed a deeper love for Christ within me.
 - But even more than that, pondering Christ's love for sinful man writ large across the linen of the Shroud made me long for God, to be united with God.
 - For what can be more alluring than knowing that you're loved and forgiven, even when you've committed terrible sins against your beloved?
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- As we enter into the holy season of Advent, we are beckoned by the prayers and readings of the Mass to be watchful for Christ's return, to be more intentional about our prayer, and to turn toward Christ in repentance of our sins.
 - We are to do this as a means of preparing for Christ's coming as man at Christmas.
 - Yet Advent isn't simply about confessing our sins and preparing for God's coming. It's a time to unite ourselves more closely with God's will, to live as God would have us live.
 - Ultimately, Advent is really about learning to long for God as our highest good. Through Advent the Church calls us to choose for God, to will to be united to Him.
 - In order to long for God as we should, we must first rid ourselves of the obstacles in our relationship with God, namely sin. This is why the Church encourages us to cultivate a true sense of repentance during Advent.
 - As a penitential season, symbolized by our use of the color violet and suppression of the *Gloria*, Advent encourages us to survey the wreckage caused by our sins so that we can see what we've lost by our vices and thereby be inspired to pursue virtue!
 - We are called to take stock of our lives, to see our sins for what they are, and to change so that we might be well prepared for Christ's coming: both His coming as man at the Incarnation, but also His coming again at the end of time when He will judge us all.
 - We get a feel for the ache of sin that we all know so well in our first reading today as the prophet Isaiah asks, "Why do you let us wander, O Lord, from your ways, and harden our hearts so that we fear You not?"

- Isaiah recognizes the terrible sinfulness of the Jewish people, and knows all too well how sin damages and can even destroy one's relationship with God. As Isaiah says, our sins can harden our hearts if we do not repent of them.
 - Sin makes us selfish and self-centered. And if we focus too much on ourselves and seek only to please ourselves, we cannot love God, nor will we desire union with Him.
 - That's why there's a palpable sense of longing as Isaiah pines to our Lord: "Return for the sake of your servants, . . . Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down." Isaiah is begging the Lord to come quickly to save us from our sins!
 - This desire to be free of our sins, and this longing for God's presence are things that we must make our own during this beautiful season.
 - For it is this longing for a Savior, Who will come in humility as a tiny baby at Christmas and Who will come again in glory at the end of time to judge the living and the dead, that helps to keep us on the path to holiness.
 - Because Advent not only prepares us for Christmas, but also focuses our attention on our Lord's second coming at the end of time, our longing for Him must be coupled with a firm decision to be united to God's will.
 - For choosing to do God's will, to fully embrace His will – regardless of how we feel about it – along with repenting of our sins is the very best way for us to be prepared to meet Christ face to face.
 - Yet, as I mentioned last Sunday, we must make time for reflection. We have to make time in this busy season to be silent, to pray, to engage with God rather than the secular world. That's the best way to cultivate a true longing for God within ourselves.
 - But this means that we must not let the secular exigencies of this time of year rob us of the time we need to prepare for Christ's coming as we should.
 - And inundated as we are this time of year by the siren song of secularism, the temptation to focus on the things of this world rather than the things of God is undeniable and quite forceful, and can only be countered by prayer and silence.
 - Thus, Advent bids us to get our priorities straight. So, rather than mindlessly scrolling through social media or taking in unedifying media, come to daily Mass and adoration so that you may be fed and nourished by the Prince of Peace.
 - Think not about what it is you want and desire for Christmas, but think rather of what you can do and what you can provide for others.
 - Make the time to examine your conscience well, and make a good confession. But more than anything else, choose to unite yourself to God and His will, and long for Him as you would for a loved one who has been away from home for a long time.
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- As Advent begins, may we all awake from any spiritual torpor so that our Lord may not find us sleeping when He comes.
 - Through our prayer and silent meditation may we prepare well for our infant king. By His grace, may we be adorned with virtue and holiness this Christmas, rather than filled with the mammon of this world.
 - Most importantly, may we repent of our sins, love God more, and long for His coming.
 - May our mighty king come quickly!