ADVENT: A TIME TO WAKE-UP, CLEAN-UP AND LOOK-UP

Happy New Year! This weekend we begin a new liturgical year with the First Sunday of Advent.

While the world prepares for Christmas in superficial ways; shopping, decorations, parties and gifts, the Church invites her children to a deeper preparation through spiritual renewal, active waiting and hopeful expectation.

Jesus in the Gospel does not tell his disciples to calculate the day or hour of his coming. Rather, He commands them to be watchful and alert. Why? Because we do not know when the Master of the house will return.

Imagine a family expecting an important visitor. The mother cleans the house, the children arrange the sitting room, the father makes sure everything is in order. Nobody wants the visitor to arrive and find the house unprepared. But what if the visitor is not coming to inspect our house, but our hearts? That is the spiritual message of Advent.

Our Advent journey invites us to wake-up, clean-up and look-up.

We are called to wake-up. Gradually, Christians allow the busyness of life to drift them from God. We wake up, rush to work, attend to family, pay bills, follow the news, engage in social media and go to bed exhausted. We have time for everything except prayer. We remember birthdays and deadlines but forget our daily appointment with God. This is spiritual sleep. St. Paul reminds us: "It is now the moment for you to wake from sleep" (Rom 13:11). Advent calls us to wake up from prayerlessness, resentment, indifference to the suffering of others, and the habit of postponing our conversion.

We are also called to clean-up. The prophet Isaiah cries out for divine intervention, declaring: "We have all become like one who is unclean." We clean our houses for Christmas, but there is a more needed cleaning - that of our hearts. We do this through the Sacrament of Reconciliation - do not let Christmas arrive without encountering God's mercy; through forgiveness and reconciliation - we cannot welcome the Prince of Peace while keeping hatred alive; and through charity - remembering the lonely, sick, elderly and poor.

Finally, we are called to look-up. Advent is not only looking inward but looking upward. Our Psalm prays: "Lord, make us turn to you; let us see your face and we shall be saved." As St. Paul assures us: "God is faithful, and by Him you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord." Like a parent helping a child learning to walk, when we fall, God stretches out His hand. As St. Augustine says: "You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you."

Let us wake up, clean up, and look up, so that Christ will find a welcoming home when He comes.