

First Sunday of Advent
Message Series #1 – PEACE

The First Sunday of Advent always has us looking into the future to the time when Jesus will return a second time to earth. St. Mark, the author of today's gospel reading, as well as the Christian community to whom he was writing were convinced that this second coming of Jesus was imminent. Hence his warning to "be watchful," and "be alert" because no one knows when the Lord will be coming.

St. Paul in the second reading is also confident that the second coming is imminent. He urges the Christians of Corinth "to get their act together" as they wait for "the day of the Lord Jesus Christ."

Isaiah the prophet in the first reading expresses it this way in his prayer to God: "Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down!" It has been many centuries since the time of Isaiah, Paul and Mark and Jesus has still not come a second time. Yet each Sunday we profess in the Nicene Creed that we believe that Jesus "will come again to judge the living and the dead and his kingdom will have no end." Do you believe what you profess?

No one really knows what it will be like when Jesus fully establishes his kingdom. The scriptures speak of a "new heaven and a new earth." Some talk about a return to the days before original sin. There are many Christians who believe that the end of the world as we know it will be brought about in violent ways. For example, various Christian groups around the world predicted in early September that the end would come on September 23. They cited the August eclipse, the great destruction brought about hurricanes and flooding, and the possibility of nuclear war with Korea as fulfilling various biblical prophecies that supposedly forecast the end of the world.

As humans there is nothing we can do about eclipses, we can perhaps lessen the destruction of hurricanes by limiting our “carbon footprint,” but we can prevent nuclear war since war is a fully human activity.

Early Christians faced a dilemma when it came to war. The teachings of Jesus to “turn the other cheek” and to “love one’s enemies” seemed to suggest a pacifist approach to conflict. This all changed with the teachings of St. Augustine in the 5th century. He developed what is now called the Just War Theory. It provides a variety of criteria to justify going to war and as well as criteria for fighting a war. There is all kinds of information online about it as well as in *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.

Let’s take a concrete example, a preventive strike by the U.S. on North Korea. The two leaders of these countries have been throwing insults back and forth for months now both pledging to totally destroy each other’s country.

One of the criteria for going to war is called “the last resort.” It can be argued that the U.S. has not exhausted all of its diplomatic and economic options to prevent war and hence war is not the last resort at this time. Another criteria is “probability of success.” Because the way that North Korea’s nuclear weapons are hidden and dispersed it is very hard to conceive of a use of force that would completely eliminate their nuclear capacity. In other words, success is uncertain. A third criteria is “proportionality,” that is, you don’t’ fight a war that causes more harm than good. Much of South Korea and Japan for example, would be devastated if war began. These three criteria seem to suggest that a preventative strike on North Korea at the present time would be morally unjustifiable.

At this time of year we frequently hear references to Jesus as “The Prince of Peace.”

And so our message series this Advent will be on peace. Peace, not just between countries, but between individuals and families as well as peace within our own selves. How is God calling you to be an instrument of His peace?