

Homily

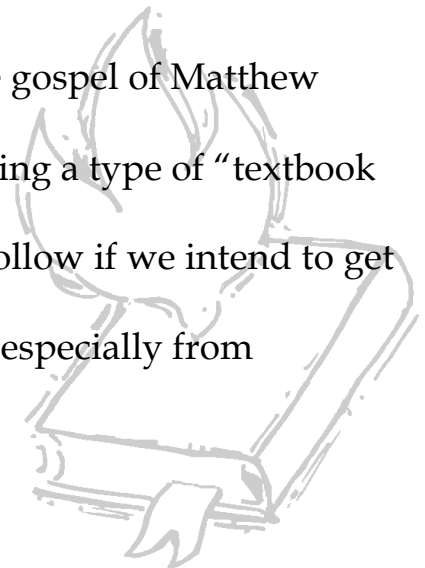
1st Sunday of Advent - A

Rev. Peter G. Jankowski
November 29-30, 2025

Is 2: 1-5
Ps 122: 1-2, 3-4, 4-5, 6-7, 8-9
Rom 13: 11-14
Mt 24: 37-44

Reflecting on the theme on which I wanted to focus the homilies I am offering during the season of Advent, I was thinking about the readings that we just read from today's Mass. With the start of a new liturgical season (on the Sunday closest to, or falling on, November 30 – the Feast of St. Andrew) we return to the initial cycle of readings and Cycle A as the cycle of Sunday readings seem to be designed, we have three Sunday liturgical cycles, called Cycles A, B, and C. As we finished the Cycle C Sunday readings from the Gospel of Luke on the Solemnity of Christ the King, we return to the beginning of the Cycle A readings focusing on the Gospel of Matthew.

Starting with this first Sunday of Advent, the gospel of Matthew focuses on a general theme of Jesus' message being a type of "textbook of faith" and the parameters of life we need to follow if we intend to get into heaven. The stories in the scriptures today, especially from



Matthew's gospel, tell us that because of our sinful nature, because we prefer to live in darkness rather than light, that we need to be prepared for the time when the light will come.

In the way of life we currently live, we are so conditioned to live in anger, contrary to what God teaches us, to live in condemnation, to live in marginalization, to tear down the things of the world that we forget about love. Because the world has such a grip on us, a strangle hold, those of faith can see the devil working so hard so that we forget about the light and the one thing that is going to lead us to the kingdom of heaven.

In today's story of Isaiah, you focus on this evil king named Ahaz who is doing evil things. Isaiah knows what is going to happen to both Ahaz and those he serves because of all of this evil. As a response, Isaiah talks about being prepared for the light, being prepared for the Messiah.

In the Gospel of Matthew today, Jesus tells us that on that final day, (which we do not know when will come), we need to be prepared for the last coming of our Lord – this is the theme for the first two weeks of Advent in every liturgical season.

We understand through these readings how we become so immersed in the things of the world and the things of hatred that the world *wants* us to be conditioned to hate over love and, as a result, the world conditions us to forget about God. We are so conditioned in this particular way so that we do not see the light because we are so embedded in the darkness. So we need to be prepared.

As I was reflecting on these themes, you may think that all of this sounds like a negative lead-in to a series of Advent talks on which I wish to focus. However, there is a positive to come from what I am reflecting. The light exists in the world and certainly in our hearts but we have to encounter it, which requires us to cleanse our hearts and remove the obstacles the cloud this light.

When is the last time that any of you have gone to confession? When is the last time you have cleaned your hearts (or my heart, for that matter)? Are we so built up with this dirt as Pope Benedict would say that our “room” is so dirty that we cannot breathe? When we cannot see the true light and purpose of our lives, we then become our own gods; that is the downside of our first reading. During Isaiah’s time, the kings

became their own gods... and the same thing is happening in today's age. We are so conditioned to the ways of the world that we do not need God; we can handle our life issues on our own without interference. That kind of thought is called "Pelagianism," which is a bad heresy in our life, saying that God is not necessary for salvation.

What I wanted to do this Advent is focus on "Stories of Light in the Darkness," stories of hope that would help me in my journey this Advent and hopefully will help you as well. For our Advent reflections, I thought about a Stories of Light in the Darkness that really do help me out. Whether it be today's story about the Italian Chapel (1 Advent) or possibly about the "Beggar Priest" who had left active ministry and become a homeless person that encountered St. Pope John Paul II (2 Advent). I reflected on my cousin Gina Novelli-Petrecca who died of cancer at the age of 51 and how he became a light to the St. Viator Community (Immaculate Conception) or a couple named Mike & Estella (Lidia) Cronk who, during this time of darkness, had done so many good things for those who were suffering (3 Advent) and ended up getting married in the Church as a result. I reflected on a story here in

Momence, IL about a teenager who was lost because her mother had left her, was working two jobs, and the story how one couple from Momence High School (David & Dianne Marcotte) gave her a sense of hope in a time of hopelessness (4 Advent).



To begin these reflections, I remembered how, a few years ago, I served on a Holland America cruise ship, the MS Prinsendam, on a cruise line where I have served as chaplain for over twenty years. Through this cruise ship ministry, I have visited all the continents of the world with the exception of Antarctica (which will be resolved in the upcoming year).

Some years back, I sailed on the Prinsendam from Amsterdam and around the islands of Great Britain. In Amsterdam, I met a former parishioner who took me on a personal tour on the river encircling the city, showing me all the sites, and then taking me to the cruise terminal. On the way to the cruise terminal, this person told me about the story of his life, his family and how he was trying to get back on the right path. I love those stories where people humble themselves and realize that without God, they are nothing and they're going to be caught and enveloped in this darkness but turn to God and see the light.

On the Prinsendam, I was sailing around the islands of Britain and you know Ireland, England, Scotland, Wales, as well as the island of Guernsey with the world's smallest chapel. On the land tours, I was visiting a whole slew of castles that were not maintained, a theme I discussed at the Mass of the Dedication of the Lateran Basilica earlier this month.

While I was visiting Scotland, not only did we visit castles and stood where the Loch Ness Monster supposedly lived, we also travelled to the



island of Lamb home in Orkney, Scotland, where I was taught the story of “The Little Italian Chapel,” which had a wonderful story that unite

enemies into friends.

I was told that the origin of this “Little Italian chapel” took place during World War II, where the Axis powers tried to destroy the rest of the world and how the rest of the world had to come together to defend themselves and ultimately defeat the Axis powers. On this island of Orkney, I learned how when I saw this little chapel and I ended up getting told the story of how this chapel came to existence. As told from the website associated to this chapel...

The Italian Chapel consists of two Nissen huts transformed into a beautiful chapel by Domenico Chiocchetti and his colleagues, Italian prisoners of war captured in North Africa and transported to the Island of Lamb Holm in Orkney.

In October 1939 a German submarine under the command of

Gunther Prien entered Scapa Flow and sank the British battleship 'HMS Royal Oak' with the loss of 834 lives. Winston Churchill, at that time First Sea Lord, visited Orkney and the decision was taken to construct barriers to close off four of the entrances to Scapa Flow to make the base for the home fleet more secure.

A shortage of manpower to construct the barriers coincided with the capture of thousands of Italian soldiers fighting in North Africa, so a decision was taken to transport 550 men to Camp 60 on Lamb Holm and a similar number to Camp 34 in Burray.

Following a request from the camp priest, Fr Giacobazzi, it was agreed that two Nissen huts would be joined together to provide a chapel. Among the Italians in Camp 60 was an artist, Domenico Chiocchetti, and he was given the task of transforming the two Nissen huts into a chapel. He was assisted by other tradesmen - in particular Giuseppe Palumbi, a blacksmith, and Domenico Buttapasta, a cement worker.

Domenico Chiocchetti carried in his pocket a small prayer card given to him by his mother before he left his home in Italy, and it was the image on that card of the Madonna and Child by Nicolo Barabino that Chiocchetti based his painting above the altar in the Chapel. When the Camp Commander, Major Buckland, realized that the prisoner was a very talented artist he was allowed to continue painting to make the building more attractive.

Now, decades after the completion of the Chapel, it is one of Orkney's most loved attractions.

There is also strong friendship with the town of Moena in Italy, the home of Chiocchetti, and Orkney, and members of the family visit the islands from time to time. Chiocchetti's daughter, Letizia, is an Honorary President of the Friends of the Italian Chapel Committee. Antonella Papa, a restoration artist from Rome, who had previously

done work in the Sistine Chapel, has also spent time working in the Chapel to refresh areas of Chiocchetti's painting.

In August 2014 three of the Station of the Cross were stolen. Replacement plaques were carved in Moena are in place in the Chapel, but this has resulted in the installation of CCTV cameras which, it is hoped, will deter any further damage to the Chapel. In 2016 Custodians were put in place to further insure the daily protection of the building and to also manage the numbers of visitors entering at one time. (<https://www.orkney.com/listings/the-italian-chapel>).

I came to learn that, fifty years after this chapel was built, many of the Italian prisoners of war who built that chapel returned to Orkney to pray in that little chapel and remind themselves that at this time of darkness when the Italians were held as prisoners of war in Scotland, that the Scots and the Italians built a type of friendship that endured for fifty plus years and hopefully endures to this day. At a time of darkness, we had two different groups of people vastly different in their political and otherwise beliefs coming together for the love of God and building something where everyone could pray together.

In this story, I was reminded there was no Jew or Greek, slave or free in the world of faith during World War II. During the building of that

chapel, both Italians and Scots worked together and everyone built a house of God together. This is the secret of building a church and bringing light into the darkness.

For that one moment of suffering and darkness at the height of despair, instead of casting people off and marginalizing the other, two “enemies” found a way to make friends with those that you normally would not... and that is how you build a church... and that is how the little Italian chapel has continued on into the present day.

Had I not traveled to the British Isles way back when a couple times during my cruise ship journeys, I would have never known about that chapel or the little chapel in Guernsey, the chapel that only holds one person. (I was told that the one person chapel in Guernsey had a hole too small for the enlarged bishop to enter and bless so the people building the chapel had to open up the hole of the entrance so that the bishop could get through to celebrate Mass.

When I open my heart to learn these stories of faith during times of darkness, when you see a light which allows two groups of enemies to see each other as brothers and sisters to work on a project of mutual

interest, you begin to hope and wonder if we could do the same today as a body of Christ, all of us coming together with Jesus as the head (as represented through the priest or the bishop). What a wonderful world we would have if we figured out a way to remove all hate and build a relationship out of love.

However, as long as the darkness lives in a community, as long as hate lives in the community and marginalization, as soon as we shut people off and keep people only in our little circle, then we are not going to see that light. *This* is the message of our scripture readings today. “Be prepared as if you are waiting for the thief in the night” (Mt 24: 43).

In today’s gospel, in the world of faith, we must let that light enter our hearts. We are challenged prepared for that light by doing what God asks us to do; if we do this, then we have a chance to get to heaven. If not, we are going to be enveloped in this darkness on the last day for the rest of our existence. That is the message I learned from a group of Italian and Scotsmen (and women!) who ended up working together to doing something beautiful that has endured to this day.

That is a pretty good message that we can embrace during the season of Advent, to begin this season to seek that light to find something positive that will bring us together. Let us embrace that light. Let us wait for that light. And let us share this light with the people that we meet. This is our prayer.

The Italian Chapel

Lamb Holm, Orkney, KW17 2SF

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The Custodians do hope visitors will enjoy their time in the Chapel. A small booklet is available in English, Italian and German which, for a donation of £1.00, tells the story in words and pictures and gives a full explanation of the Chapel and its construction. [Find out more about](#)

[accessibility at the Italian Chapel.](#)

A website, created by family of the prisoners from Italy which includes PDF's of the three brochures, can be [viewed here](#).

God of power and mercy,
you destroy war and put down earthly pride.
Banish violence from our midst and wipe away our tears,
that we may all deserve to be called your sons
and daughters.

Keep in your mercy those men and women
who have died in the cause of freedom
and bring them safely
into your kingdom of justice and peace.
We ask this through Jesus Christ our Lord.

R/. Amen