

FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT, 2025

“Come, let us climb the Lord’s mountain, to the house of the God of Jacob, that He may instruct us in His ways and we may walk in His paths.” (Isaiah 2:3)

Once, quite some time ago, a friend led me and some other lads on a hike through country he knew well, though not, as it transpired, quite as well as he thought he did. He led us off anything that seemed to me like an identifiable trail, but, trustingly, I followed him. After several hours of pushing through difficult terrain, sweating much but only grumbling a little, we stopped, while he looked around for a while, and then smiled with relief saying, “Ah, NOW I know where we are!” This statement amused the rest of us, who were in good shape and didn’t mind the sweaty hike too much. What followed did not amuse us. “It’s no good going forward from here, and we don’t have enough daylight to backtrack. We’ll just have to climb that mountain. Once over that mountain, we’re practically home.” I objected that we weren’t properly equipped, and that, anyway, I didn’t know a blasted thing about mountain climbing. “Calm down. It’s a minor mountain. We won’t have to do anything technical. Really, it’s just an uphill hike, occasionally with some scrambling over rocks.” Given the consensus that we were unprepared to pass a night out there, we agreed to his new plan. “Uphill hike” turned out to mean a long, steady, grueling, muscle draining, consistently steep march. “Some scrambling over rocks” turned out to be a bruising set of climbs over rock fields and an occasional boulder. When we arrived at home base not long before dusk, my friend smiled at me and said, “I didn’t know you had such a rich vocabulary of expletives!” Later on, I told him that only my exhaustion saved him from physical assault at that moment.

Climbing even minor mountains is not easy. You have to be prepared. Our only preparation for that unplanned climb was being very physically fit, which turned out to be preparation enough. We were fit enough to hike and scramble up that minor mountain.

Isaiah’s “Mountain of the Lord” is experiencing God as He truly is. Are we prepared for that Mountain?

That we will have an intimate encounter with God is clear in the Sacred Scriptures. “Yet in my flesh I shall see God; I myself shall see him, and my own eyes, not another’s, shall behold Him.” (Job 19:27) “When He appears, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.” (1 John 3:2)). “Now we see as through a glass, darkly, but then face to face.” (1 Corinthians 13:12) “They shall see Him face to face, and His Name shall be on their foreheads.” (Revelation 22:4)

The Sacred Scriptures also make it clear that experiencing the full reality of God will have different results for different people. “And before Him shall be gathered all the nations, and He shall separate one from another, as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.” (Matthew 25:32). For the experience of the full reality of God to be for our eternal joy and glory, we must be prepared for it.

We are all destined to experience the vision of God. For some, that experience will be glorious, and for others it will be terrible. It will be glorious for those who are properly prepared. Through the Scriptures and the worship of the Church, we are given the means to prepare ourselves, approaching God in Word and Sacrament in this life so as to be ready for the full vision of Him in the next.

People often ask why they need to come to divine worship, including the mystical rites the Church calls the Sacraments. The immediate answer is because God tells us to. He tells

us to because we need them. Our whole state of being will change someday, and we don't know when. Communion with God in this life is necessary preparation for experiencing the full reality of God in the next. Without preparation, suddenly encountering the Ultimate Reality, we could only be like John the Apostle, suddenly visited at the beginning of Revelation, "When I saw Him, I fell at His feet as though dead." (Revelation 1:17)

Be prepared! We do not know when the time allotted for our earthly preparation will be over. As we heard Jesus Christ the Lord warn us in today's Gospel, "So, then, you too must be prepared, for at an hour you do not expect, the Son of Man will come" (Matthew 24:44)

Be prepared! How?

Be prepared by participating in divine worship, especially the Sacraments. In all divine worship the Incarnate Savior, Who will be our Judge, is present. The better we become at divine worship, the more we recognize His Presence, and the more we benefit from it. What is true of all divine worship is true most especially of the Holy Eucharist, in which the Incarnate Lord is present with a unique fullness and intensity. The better we get at praying the holy Mass, the more we recognize and benefit from His veiled Presence. By recognizing and benefitting from His veiled Presence, we prepare ourselves to experience and eternally delight in His unveiled Presence.

"Now is the hour for you to wake from sleep," (Romans 13:11), we are told in the second reading. Several decades ago, Monsignor Meyer used to drive to the football dormitory in Laramie, honk his horn, and get the Catholic football kids to Mass. Wake up, and get to church!

Wake up, and come to the Lord in divine worship! Wake up, and come to the Sacraments!

Let the visible water of Baptism be poured over you, and recognize yourself washed in the invisible Blood of Christ. Let the visible hand of the priest extend over your head in the Sacrament of Penance, and recognize the invisible hand of Jesus Christ, once nailed to a Cross for your sins, but now lifting you up from the death of your sins. Let the visible Bread be broken and visible wine be poured, and recognize the invisible Body of Christ, Crucified and Risen, with Blood and water flowing from Him for your eternal life.

This Season of Advent is ordained by the Church for making, inspired and aided by God's Grace, a renewed effort to throw off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light. Now, in this particular divine worship, this Holy Mass, "Put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the desires of the flesh." (Romans 13:14).

The Lord Jesus Christ invites us to come to Him in divine worship, especially the Holy Eucharist. We can refuse this invitation. Someday, however, with our mortal bodies stripped away, He will give us an invitation that we cannot refuse to a meeting we cannot avoid.

This Advent, let us prepare for that meeting. With hopeful fear and active faith, let us prepare for that meeting. In divine worship, let us prepare for that meeting. In the holy Sacraments, let us prepare for that meeting. In the blessed Eucharist, let us prepare for that meeting.

May the merciful Lord so visit us with His saving Grace here, that we may be able to share in His perfect life hereafter.