

## FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

27 November, 2005

1. **The First Sunday of Advent** is a solemn celebration of a new year, observed as a time of preparation not only for Christmas but also for the second coming of Christ as judge at the last day. The liturgical colour of purple tells us it is a penitential season. However, the worldly activities of end of year functions, and the “affluenza” we suffer with our secular preparations for Christmas, both tend to cloud the penitential nature of Advent.
2. **Isaiah 64.1-9 and Psalm 80 both reflect the deep longing of the people of Israel for a saviour.** The prophet makes a plea for God’s mercy for undeserving nations, pleading based on the Father-child relationship of God and humanity. The psalmist echoes the generations of yearning from the recognition that we by our very nature need the salvation which only our maker can provide.
3. **1 Cor. 1.1-9, written after the coming of the Messiah,** is confident in the knowledge that although we cannot save ourselves, Jesus can support us in doing what is right. God has generously and graciously responded to our need and will continue to strengthen us and supply our needs as we wait for the revealing of Christ as our Saviour at the end of time.
4. **We don’t know the time of Christ’s return** but we need to be alert, awake to the kingdom of God. (Mark 13. 24-37. In recent weeks we have been thinking of judgment, the need to use our talents in service to others, the needs of the poor, the demand on us to be the Body of Christ, the physical presence of Christ in the world. These are the things we need to be alert and responsive to.
5. **Advent is a time to be spiritually alert.** In this penitential season we may pay more attention to prayer, to keep in mind the needs of the poor in our communities—those poor in family and friends, poor in security and happiness, as well as poor in money and possessions. May our ministering communities minister to those around us.

## ALL SAINTS

6 November, 2005

1. **What sustains people during time of great distress? Is there any meaning to this earthly life? What happens after death?** These “big questions” are religious questions with very practical implications, for the confidence with which we live this life and approach its stresses and strains very much depends on how we answer them. Today is a celebration of our Christian response to these questions.
2. **Heaven is “the dwelling -place of God, the angels and ultimately of all the redeemed, wherein they receive their eternal reward”**. (The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church) There are difficulties with this word ‘place’ and naturally as humans who dwell in time and space we are limited in our ability to think otherwise. Human images of heaven, therefore are often quite concrete.
3. **Such is the magnificent, awe-inspiring and hopeful image in Rev. 7. 9-17:** the multitude of those who are saved, the angels, all worshipping God. It is filled with hope as a time and place where there will be no more distress, no tears, no thirst and hungers, no death. We cannot explain heaven in any other way than in our own limitations, our own needs.
4. **The vision of heaven gives hope.** The beatitudes (Matt. 5. 1-12) were conveyed to the early Christian community to give them hope in the promise of the kingdom of heaven. For heaven is where God dwells, not necessarily a ‘place’. If you allow God to dwell in you, if you welcome him into your life, if you let him reign, then in that total surrender you will be sustained during times of stress, your life will have meaning, and death will be no threat to you. In this hope we live our daily lives.
5. **We are God’s children.** This hope sustains us for if we are his children then we are his heirs and ‘we will see him as he is’. (1 John 3. 1-3) and we are confident that our home is and will be with him. Today we celebrate with all God’s children in every time and every place that we are the saints.

## TWENTY-SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

13 November, 2005

1. **Following on from the celebration of All Saints where we enjoyed the wondrous prospect of heaven—life with God—we now face the question ‘Who are the redeemed?’** We don’t always like to think of judgment and we put it off to the last times, the end of life, the end of time, but the reality is we are judged every day. So, what are the matters on which we face judgment?
2. **The parable of the talents (Matt.25.14-30) concerns God’s requirement of us to give of our best,** to put to good use the gifts given to us, and to live out the duties God has entrusted to us. The parable does not give greater value to the one given five talents over the one given one. What is important is what we do with our talents. In the parable judgment is pronounced and the treatment of the one who buried his talent is harsh.
3. **So what do we make of this for our discipleship and ministry ?** Common complaints in our small churches are “We’re all too old!” and “There’s so few of us!” These are countered by our Bishop’s saying “Do what you can and not what you can’t!” Even among only a handful of elderly people, will be gifts which can be used to serve others. We need to recognize where our gifts are being used in our homes and the community and give thanks. We need to encourage those latent gifts to be dug up and used.
4. **This is how Paul encouraged the Thessalonians** (1 Thess. 5. 1-11) on how they were to live as a community while waiting for the return of Christ. Be awake and sober, full of faith and love and hope, encouraging one another and building each other up.
5. **In our ministering communities we aim to discern, edify and encourage the gifts that God has given each of us.** We work as an organism, our gifts being used in a complementary way so that together we can be the Body of Christ, serving God in the world. Let us give thanks for the talents God has given us and pray that we use them for his glory.

## CHRIST THE KING/THE REIGN OF CHRIST

20 November, 2005

1. **The Feast of Christ the King celebrates the authority of Christ which leads us to seek his peace in his kingdom.** It is a fitting finale to the Church’s Year, and the readings are rich with imagery, helping us to grasp what it is to acknowledge the kingship of Christ and to live our lives in his service.
2. **Matthew 25. 31-46 presents us with a courtroom scene,** the final time of judgment when Christ the Judge will separate those who have followed him in service to others from those who have not. Only those who have served the hungry, the thirsty, the naked and the imprisoned will receive his blessing.
3. **Ezekiel 34. 11-16, 20-24** pictures the shepherd separating his animals. The sheep which have butted out others, preventing them from grazing in good pastures will be excluded from the protection of the good shepherd who will save his flock and lead them to safety and good pasturage. This is a prophecy of hope to the downtrodden, the outcast, and the victims while a dire warning to the selfish and greedy.
4. **In this global village we live in,** these two readings are particularly relevant, both as cutting images which judge our lack of charity and service to others, and as images of hope for those who respond to Christ’s call to follow him. Christian charity recognizes no boundaries. In a world where news and images are available to us, we know where there is hunger and thirst, oppression and lack of resources. We cannot look on without responding; we cannot continue to butt out others from our pastures; we cannot continue to keep our wealth to ourselves and not feed the hungry. Christ is our judge and his rules for judgment are clear.
5. **Paul’s prayer for the Ephesians (Ephesians 1.15-23)** can be for us. May our faith and good works be a cause for thanksgiving. May we grow in a deeper understanding of what it means to live in Christ, and what the power of God can do in our lives through Christ who is supreme over all and whose fullness may be seen in the Church, the Body of Christ.