

First Sunday of Advent, A – November 30, 2025 – Very Rev. Bryan W. Jerabek, J.C.L.  
Cathedral of Saint Paul, Birmingham, Ala. – 7:15am and 11:00am Sunday Masses – 620 words

By way of ancient tradition, we hear a great deal from the Book of the Prophet Isaiah during the season of Advent – not only as the first reading for each Sunday of this “A” Cycle that we have just begun and most Sundays of the “B” cycle too, but also in many of the daily Masses of the season. Among the Jewish people, Isaiah was the greatest of the prophets – sort of on the same level as Saint Paul is in the New Testament tradition. It’s fascinating to note that in the last century, when the great discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls happened in the cave at Qumran, the only complete biblical manuscript found was that of Isaiah. And after the Psalms, his writings are the most-quoted in the New Testament. The great Saint Jerome thought of Isaiah as “not only a prophet...but an Evangelist”. In a surpassing way, his prophecies point to the coming of Christ.

...Which is what we celebrate in this season we have just begun. From our place in history, we look back in time to Christ’s first coming, even as we look ahead with hope to his second and final coming. And though we make this sort of binary distinction, we recognize that there is a sort of “middle coming” that unfolds through time too, as Jesus is with us always, especially via the sacraments and his Church. Yes, maybe the binary perspective is a bit too black-and-white – for it’s not just “back then...and later on”, but “back then...yet for always”. The first reading certainly implied this, if we consider its prophecy as pointing toward the first coming – and then to the stream of people flowing towards the holy mountain, God’s Church, throughout history. That flow will someday reach its zenith; then the Lord will appear in glory.

Though we might well be caught up in this continuum between the beginning and the end, yet the end must not elude our grasp. To put it another way, we do well to focus on the “here and now”, on “today”, but we do even better if we do so with a view to our final goal. Yes, looking back to that binary perspective, we are indeed someplace between beginning and end; but that does not mean we will never arrive there. The second reading and gospel of this Sunday drive that point home. And perhaps this is helpful for us all on a certain level. For isn’t it the case that we take comfort in our faith? That we enjoy that “middle coming”, of which I spoke – that we appreciate the Lord’s visitation through time, through the sacraments, and that, in a certain way, we are happy to “stay there”, rather than continuing along, resolutely toward the goal?

Yes, our faith surely is a consolation, and thanks be to God for that! But this season of Advent, especially as it begins, shakes us out of resting too securely on good feelings, challenging us to focus: Where exactly are we headed? When could our end happen? The gospel uses that familiar figure, the “thief in the night”, which perhaps fills us with a certain dread. And Saint Paul effectively tells us that now is the time – not tomorrow; not even a few years from now, perhaps after we shall have accomplished whatever worldly goals we have. As the prophet Isaiah reminds us, we are climbing God’s holy mountain; he spurs us on until we reach the very heights, rather than allowing us to settle for some lesser point along the way. We are to “walk in the light of the Lord”, to live in his grace – looking for him each day, until he returns in glory.