

1st Sunday of Advent - Matthew 24:37-44

God finally had had enough and decided to end the world. However, He wanted to warn the people. He decided to call the three most influential people of the world. He therefore summoned President Donald Trump, the President of China, and Bill Gates into one room and told them of His plan and asked them to go out and inform the world.

President Trump immediately appeared on FOX News and told the U.S., "I have good news and bad news. The good news is that God congratulated me for supporting our Veterans. The bad news is that He is going to end the world and I won't be able to complete my first term and bring back full prosperity to our country."

The President of China went to the Communist network and told his people: "I have bad news and worse news. The bad news is that, despite what we have taught all these years, there IS a God. The worse news is that He is upset. He is about to end the world."

Bill Gates turned to the internet and informed the world: "I have good news and better news... The good news is that God thinks I am one of the three most influential people on earth... The better news is that Microsoft need not upgrade its *WINDOWS* anymore.

There is a saying in architecture, "First we shape the building and then the building shapes us." That insight points to an interplay—a give and take—between ourselves and the spaces we inhabit.

Buildings don't just happen, someone shapes them, someone designs them, someone decides how many rooms there will be, how many windows, how much open space.

But, once those decisions are made and we live in the buildings, the buildings then shape us. They influence our lives either for good or for ill.

What is true about buildings is also true about **traditions**. We shape our traditions. But then our traditions shape us. Our decisions about what we are going to do or not do, how we're going to gather with other people are decisions we make.

But once we put them into practice they influence us and help shape who we are as people. As in architecture, there is a give and take; an interplay between ourselves and our traditions.

Now this is a very important point to consider because in the upcoming weeks we are going to enact a number of traditions. We all carry customs for the seasons of Advent and Christmas, traditions that we bring from our childhood, from our heritage.

These customs are an important part of the holidays. But for them to work well, for them to do the job they are intended to do, those traditions need to fit our lives, **and the truth is** our lives are changing.

We are not the same people we were when we were children. We are not even the same people we were last year.

Therefore, every so often in the interplay between our traditions and our lives we need to ask the question, "Is there something about our traditions that we need to change? Do we need to reshape our traditions so that they in turn can reshape us?"

Now, to make this kind of shaping and reshaping clear, we have to know what is going on in our lives. We need to read the signs of the time and be in touch with what is really happening around us.

This is what the Gospel addresses. The people of Noah's time are criticized because they were not in touch with what was going on around them. They did not see the upcoming flood and they continued on with life as usual up until the very day that Noah entered the ark.

This is why the Gospel is telling us, "Stay awake. Be ready. Be attentive. Be in touch with what is really happening in your life so that you will be able to sense what needs to change, what needs to stay the same."

What are some of the changes that might be going on in our life that could impact our holiday traditions? There might have been someone in our life recently who has died: a parent, a grandparent, a spouse.

With that person missing the whole pattern of our family network changes. We might need to replace that person's role in our holiday traditions by asking someone else to assume it or perhaps sharing that role among a number of people.

Children in our life might have married or moved away so that once where there were twelve people around the Christmas table, this year there might be six or two.

Our children might be growing older, entering high school or college and there might be issues going on in our life so that we are looking now in our traditions for more than Santa Claus and opening presents.

We need to be reading the signs of the times in our life and asking ourselves, "How do our holiday traditions need to be reshaped to fit the people we are?" Now these are questions that **you** must answer.

But let me offer a few examples of the kind of reshaping that could be useful. If you sense in your family that people are maturing and looking for more from the holidays than simply opening presents, why not take action as the host of the holiday celebration to call ahead and invite one or two people to share what is happening in their lives?

Christmas after all is about Emmanuel, God with us. Why not find a space within your traditions for one or two people to say, “How did I know that God was with me this year?” It will deepen and spiritualize your traditions.

If someone has died, then there should be a place in your holiday traditions to remember that person, perhaps including them in the prayer before the meal, or perhaps asking someone to share a story about them that would capture their spirit.

If your children have grown and moved away and you find yourself with less activity and more time on your hands, then perhaps service should become a part of your holiday traditions.

You could volunteer at the Soup Kitchen or perhaps change your work schedule to work on Christmas morning freeing up someone else to be with their family.

If there are less people around your table then perhaps you should think of asking someone to join you, another couple whose children have moved away or someone who is living alone.

Remember these traditions do not all have to center on Christmas itself. People who are alone are alone on more than just December 25th. You could invite them over the day after Christmas or the Sunday after Christmas.

As long as we are alive, we are changing, and our holiday traditions should change as well so that they reflect the people we are today. Don't put this responsibility aside. You only have a few weeks before the holidays.

Do not go blindly into the traditions you did last year without first asking, "Do my celebrations need to be adapted to fit the life I am living now?"

God becomes present to us when we gather together and so it is important to gather together well.

Make your plans now. Plan to reshape your traditions so that they in turn can reshape you. We have the power to change the way we celebrate and therefore, give to our traditions a greater power to call us closer to one another, to bring us closer to God.