

The First Sunday of Advent November 28, 2021

When Tom was in his mid-forties, he woke up one morning with a lot of pain and stiffness in his leg. At first, he thought he had just tweaked a muscle or that it was a bout of arthritis. He hoped that if he just took a few aspirin and ignored it, he'd start feeling better. However, the pain would not go away and he was finding it increasingly more difficult to walk. Though his wife encouraged him to go to the doctor, he kept putting it off thinking that it would take care of itself with time. However, when it became clear that his leg wasn't getting better, Tom scheduled an appointment with his doctor. After running a battery of tests, the doctor gave him the news. Tom had a malignant bone cancer that was very advanced. Even with aggressive treatment, the doctor didn't give him much hope of surviving it.

Tom was devastated. It seemed as though his whole world was caving in on him. He had no idea how he would break the news to his wife and children. In those moments, he thought about all the time he had missed with his family because he was too busy working. He always thought he had plenty of time but it became clear to him that he never really had as much time as he thought.

As his health declined, Tom would tell family and friends not to feel sorry for him. He came to see this sickness as a gift. It helped him to see how precious life was and to appreciate what really mattered. He was thankful that he had time to enjoy what time was left and that he was able to realize all that God had blessed him with before it was too late.

Time is one of the most precious things we have. Like many other things in life, we often don't appreciate it until it's gone.

In today's gospel, Jesus tells us, "Beware that your hearts do not become drowsy from carousing and drunkenness and the anxieties of daily life, and that day catch you by surprise like a trap." Jesus is warning us that this world is passing away. Our lives are short, and we have much less time than we think.

No matter how we have chosen to spend our time up to this point, God never ceases to call us back to him and remind us that we were created to live with him forever in heaven. From the perspective of faith we can take a look at how we have used our time and make a new commitment to what is most important. It is never too late to start over and make up for lost time with God and our loved ones.

In today's second reading, Saint Paul gives us a game plan for re-centering our lives on God and His word.

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The first thing he tells us is that we should "increase and abound in love for one another and for all." We were created by God with a heart that can only find fulfillment in loving others. If our activities are not helping us to grow in love then they are useless. If we are too busy to show basic kindness to people or to help those in need, then we are wasting our time. In the end, we will be judged on how we have loved others. Everything else is meaningless. And so the first step to re-focusing our lives on God is to cut out of our schedules any activities that keep us from loving others as we should.

The second thing Saint Paul tells us is that we should be "blameless in holiness." God wants us to love Him above all things. We should never be so busy that we don't make time to pray or go to Mass. If we let that happen, we will lose sight of the whole reason why we exist in the first place. And if we use our busy schedules as an excuse to indulge in sinful behavior, then we are really missing the mark. We have been given the gift of the Holy Spirit in baptism and confirmation to make us holy as God is holy. And so the second step to regaining a meaningful life is to cross off our calendar any activities that keep us from attending Mass, from praying regularly, or which are leading us to sin.

The third thing Saint Paul tells us is that we should act so as "to please God." When we look at how we are choosing to spend our time, we should be asking ourselves, "Is what I am doing pleasing to God?" We will only have success in life when we are acting in accordance with God's plan for us. If we are doing something which is against God's will, we will face nothing but failure and frustration. On the other hand, when our lives are harmonized with God's word, things work out for us. We find the strength to overcome whatever obstacles we face. Our lives become less hectic and more peaceful. It is not always easy to know what God's plan is. That is why making time for prayer and to read the Bible is so important. Without it, we can get lost pretty quickly. And so the third step to bringing our lives into harmony with God's will for us is to ask ourselves whether or not what we are doing is pleasing to God.

Today we begin the four weeks of preparation leading up to the feast of Christmas. The festivities of the coming month will keep us very busy. But if we are not preparing our hearts with as much care as we are preparing our homes and our tables then we are wasting our time. These weeks provide us a precious opportunity to re-center our lives on God by focusing on love, on holiness and on pleasing him in whatever we do. None of us knows how much time we have left. Let's not waste any more of it. Rather, let us keep our focus on what's most important and we will know the joy of this season more profoundly than we could ever imagine.