**1 Advent, Is 64:1-9, Ps 80, 1 Cor 1:3-9; Mark 13:24-37; Rev Mary Trainor**

|  |
| --- |
|  |

"***show us the light of your countenance, and we shall be saved." (Ps 80)***

I wear contact lenses. My eyes are both very near and far sighted, and I have a major astigmatism. With my eye challenges, I can see better with contacts than I can with glasses; I have worn various types of contacts for over 50 years! Oh yes, I have much experience with contact lens fitting. I have learned that direct and complete contact with the eye is essential for a good contact lens fit. If the lens does not sit perfectly on the eye, then I see blurry, or the lens is not comfortable. The key to my seeing well, and really functioning well overall, is direct, tight contact with the lens.

The key to our seeing well, functioning well in life, is direct, tight contact with Jesus. Yes, a close relationship with Jesus Christ our Savior gives us peace, direction, purpose, calm, love in our lives. Our relationship with Christ is not just life giving, it is life. This morning, we celebrate the beginning of the church year: the First Sunday of Advent. It does not seem like New Year's Day, but it is in the Church -- and has been that way since the 9th Century. Why does the church year start in the season of Advent? It starts now because this is the beginning of our close contact with Jesus. This is the season when we celebrate that Christ came as a human being, as a child to live among us, to help us know that He understands our human struggles. Jesus came to give His life that we might have life. St. Paul said in our Epistle reading this morning, "***the grace of God...has been given you in Christ Jesus, for in every way you have been enriched in him....you are not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ....God is faithful; by him you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord."*** So, we have everything we need right now for this close relationship with Jesus. Unlike my contact lenses, that get fit with numerous expensive and fussy trips to the optometrist, our relationship with Jesus is free and available without a special appointment. This is a past, present, and future thing too. The theologians call this: "**Already/Not Yet:"** we have already been saved and yet we aren't there yet. Christ has already come, Christ is here in us, and yet we cannot completely comprehend the magnitude of God's love until we get to heaven, until the Second Coming.

In this morning's Gospel, Jesus is talking dramatically to us about when He will come again, about what the Second Coming will be like. Some people do a countdown of when they think that Jesus will return--you have heard about them doing this in the news. In our culture right now, we are now in a different kind of countdown: a countdown of the number of days before Christmas (which is down to 24, by the way). Advertisers try to raise our anxiety about the need to prepare, the need to shop until we drop. And yet, this shopping preparation is not a source of Light or peace. Are we to keep a countdown about Jesus? No. We are to live as if His return could be any minute; we are to be prepared all the time. With Jesus, we don't have to spend any money or shop; it is a relationship that is free. Our preparation comes in the form of prayer, in the form of accepting God's love.

We have two special symbols for Advent: Light and the Advent Wreath. The Advent Wreath originated in the early 1500s. The greens of the wreath represent life, creation. The wreath is a circle, symbolizing the eternal. Light represents Christ, who entered the world to scatter the darkness of evil and show us the way. We light candles as reminders of the Christ light that has entered our lives. We pray for Christ's light to fill us. Three of the candles are purple, symbolizing our penance and preparation for Christ coming. There is one pink candle, for the third Sunday in Advent; this is the rose candle, symbolizing the joy of the Lord. The white candle in the middle it lit on Christmas Eve, when we celebrate the nativity and Christ's victory over the darkness.

The Psalmist prayed, in Psalm 80 we prayed this morning: "***show us the light of your countenance, and we shall be saved.***" This was written in a time when the people were in a world of hurt, and they are telling God about their troubles. We are in a world of hurt too: recent events locally, nationally, and globally have us disturbed. In our culture, people turn to all kinds of self-focused things to stem their hurt and pain: material goods (shopping), drugs, alcohol. But these things only give temporary solace, and then things can get even worse: addiction, debt. Self-indulgence does not bring hope or peace, but instead can bring even more trouble. When our relationship with Jesus is firm, when the contact is tight, there is no room for things that are not of God, the darkness, to sneak into our lives. God is present, God is faithful, God is here to take our burdens, God is the source of hope and peace. When we do sense that our contact with God is pulling away, it is us who are moving and not God -- and we need to pray as the Psalmist said today: "***Restore us, O God***." Then there will be no space in between our souls and Him, Christ's light will prevail.

How can you remember to make contact with Jesus all the time? Here is two ideas.

(1)when you hear advertisers counting down the number of shopping days until Christmas, use this as a cue, a reminder, to actively seek more of Jesus.

(2) Pray in this way: Right now, just get comfortable in your seats and close your eyes. Repeat in your head (over and over again) the words from Psalm 80: "***show us the light of your countenance, and we shall be saved.***" Now, picture in your mind the face of Christ gazing lovingly upon you. Keep your eyes closed and bask in the Light that comes from His face to you. This is not just any light, it is Christ's Light. Feel its brightness and warmth through your closed eyes. This Light is both bright and gentle, not blinding. This Light is able to illuminate the dark places inside of you; it finds every nook and cranny that have darkness in them. This Christ Light is healing, restoring. Receive this perfect Light of Christ through your face. "***Show us the light of your countenance, and we shall be saved.***"

This Advent season, actively and expectantly make contact with Jesus through worship, prayer, study, service, the Sacrament. See His face, His Light. He wants to give you more of His Love , more of His grace. Amen.