

Be Alert at all Times!

As we enter into the season of Advent, the four weeks of preparation for Christmas, the first Sunday's Gospel from St. Luke asks us to be alert at all times. Jesus warns us that there will be many signs and portents that we will not understand, yet we must be strong and faithful to endure what happens, in order that we can stand firm and steadfast "before the Son of Man." The reading calls our attention to this special season and encourages us to use this time to grow in faith and as St. Paul notes "to abound in love for one another and for all."

It is appropriate therefore that we hear this call as we begin the Jubilee Year of Mercy proclaimed by Pope Francis. This Jubilee Year is a time of great grace and mercy and a time for us, as individuals and as groups, to reflect on how we are living the Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy in our lives. The year challenges us and rewards us for these works of mercy. A Jubilee Year is a year of many blessings. Even our simplest act of kindness or gesture of compassion is rewarded by God. Pope Francis calls us to not only open our hearts to God's mercy, but to be instruments of mercy for one another, especially for the poor, the lonely, those who feel abandoned and unwelcome. He calls us to make sure our hearts reflect the heart of Jesus, in our openness to others and our warmth of welcome and acceptance.

This is not always an easy task. We are asked to practice this in our work as members of the Catholic Women's League, and in our families and communities as a whole. That is why the Jubilee Year is one of great grace. We need this grace,

this help from God, in order to live the Works of Mercy in our daily lives.

Now the preparations usually taking place around our celebration of Christmas are often secular ones. We prepare gifts, decorate our homes and offices, we prepare special meals and we send greetings to friends and family. These are all important, but the true meaning of Christmas for us is the awareness that God “so loved the world that he gave his only son” in order that we might be saved. This great act of love and generosity is really beyond our imagining and comprehension. It shows the immense mercy that God has bestowed upon us.

Let us now use these four weeks in Advent as a chance to prepare properly for the great feast of Christmas. Not only do we engage in the secular preparations, but we know that we must prepare ourselves interiorly. We seek forgiveness from God for our sins through the Sacrament of Penance, we recognize our need to reach out to those in need and those who will struggle in this Christmas season. We pray earnestly for family members and friends, in particular for those in distress, and we do our best to live the Works of Mercy daily in our interactions with others.

These four weeks, marked by the candles on the Advent wreath, are our reminder of the short time of this important season. May we always be alert and ready to respond with mercy in any situations which we encounter. May our secular preparations not distract us from the need to look into our hearts to prepare for the birth of the Lord. If we keep our minds set on these goals, then Advent we truly be the time of preparation that it is created to be for us. Again as Jesus tells

us in the Gospel: “be alert at all times, praying that you may have strength to stand before the Son of Man.”

Bishop Fred J. Colli