

**Homily for the 33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time – Cycle B
Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception
Springfield, Illinois
November 17, 2024**

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My dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

Earlier this week I turned on my car radio and was surprised to hear Christmas music playing already! I am sure you have noticed stores and homes already decorated for Christmas although we have not even celebrated Thanksgiving yet. A newspaper story earlier this week quoted a woman who put up her Christmas decorations already, saying she “had so much anxiety over the election” that she started to put up her Christmas tree “in an attempt to spark joy.”¹ Well, Jesus does bring us joy, but that is not a reason for celebrating Christmas long before the Christmas season begins.

We are at the end of the year in our liturgical calendar. The readings today point to the end times, not to frighten us, but to urge us to prepare for the coming of Christ’s kingdom. The only thing that should frighten us when we think about God’s kingdom should be when we ponder the dreadful alternative.

Next Sunday marks the end of the liturgical year with the celebration of the Solemnity of Christ the King. It is His kingdom to which we look forward to spending eternity and for which we must prepare spiritually. The Sunday after that begins Advent, as we prepare for the celebration of Christmas.

In the Creed that we pray every Sunday after the homily, we say, "He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead and his kingdom will have no end." Later we pray, "I look forward to the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come." It is these beliefs that we profess in today's readings. We tend to say these words rather easily, but they are full of mystery.

We believe that Christ will come in glory and that the dead will be raised. We also believe that at our death we will be judged according to how we have lived and so we are called to be vigilant in our actions. We trust in a loving and compassionate God. We believe that through our good actions and faith we will be prepared to meet God at death. In today's Gospel we are told that the angels will be sent to gather together the people so that the Lord may judge and welcome home those who have chosen to follow Him.

As we face the inevitable questions about the mystery of death, we can hope in Christ's reconciling sacrifice offered on the cross. By this one single

offering he has achieved the eternal perfection of all whom he is sanctifying and therefore reconciled the world to himself. We are indeed the friends of God who wait in hope expectantly for Christ's second coming. We are also reassured that the promises of Jesus will endure for ever. The coming of spring and the budding of the fig tree remind us of new life breaking into the old, of life coming from what seems like death. In a similar way the paschal mystery reminds us that Christ breaks into death by His resurrection.

While the image of Michael the archangel sending those who have been unfaithful to destruction is very frightening, we can be assured of the Lord's mercy for those who call upon his name, repent, and believe in him.

Today's readings remind us of the last judgment, the second coming and the promise of heaven or hell. During the month of November, we pray for the dead, and today's liturgy helps us to renew our hope in the resurrection and the promise of eternal life.

The readings also act as a wake-up call before the season of Advent. We are invited to get our act together so that we can more deeply welcome Christ into our lives, in our prayer, in listening to God's word, in the sacraments

and by sharing our love with others, by actions such as visiting those who are sick, bereaved or lonely. Jesus shows us the way of life.

May God give us this grace. Amen.

¹ Suzanne Vranica, “The Other Election Result: Christmas Starts Now,” The Wall Street Journal, November 8, 2024; accessed online November 17, 2024, at https://www.wsj.com/politics/elections/trump-harris-election-president-campaign-christmas-b0b92b0f?st=HUpWNa&reflink=desktopwebshare_permalink.