

Archbishop Lori's Homily: 1st Sunday of Advent

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Mount Saint Mary's University Campus Ministry Mass

Immaculate Conception Chapel

December 3, 2017

Am I right in guessing that all of you are getting ready for the semester to end? As you look ahead to the coming days, you see that there's a lot of work still to be done before you leave campus and go home for Christmas. Some of you might still be preparing term papers (that's what we used to call them when I was in college back in the Middle Ages). And many of you are preparing for an old-fashioned final examination (and I hope that at least some of them will be in old-fashioned blue books ...that kind we used when I was a student here at the Mount).

Whether you are preparing papers or preparing for exams or just getting ready to go home and have a good time with family and friends, the month of December is a time of preparation, a time of getting ready.

Yet, here at Mount Saint Mary's University, you are being formed to think about life in a more comprehensive way. You are being formed not to think of your life merely as a series of tasks to be completed and deadlines that have to be met. Important as it is to fulfill your responsibilities as students, as members of this community of faith, learning, and service you recognize that these are still formative years in your life. You are preparing, getting ready, for something larger, something more important.

What are those important things for which you're getting ready? I'm going to guess that near the top of the list is getting a good paying job and paying off any student debt you're accumulating. (And I'd also imagine that your parents are pulling in the same direction). After all, the students here at the Mount are amazingly talented, blessed with all kinds of diverse gifts, and through your experience here at the Mount these gifts are being honed into what are known as "marketable skills". And I

don't have to tell you that we're living in a fast-paced world where the demands for new skills emerges rapidly while older occupations and skills disappear. Thankfully, the job market seems to be stronger and our Mount graduates do very well in landing well-paying jobs. So, as you pursue your studies, I'm sure that's at least in the back of your minds.

But let's say you land the job of your dreams and are wildly successful. Many people succeed in their careers but after a time they're bored or frustrated. They find themselves accomplishing one goal after another but somehow they themselves remain unfulfilled. They may even come to look at their personal lives in terms of goals - marrying the right person, having the right kind of children, driving the right SUV, and so forth and so on. Life becomes one big futile "to-do" list. One becomes driven instead of fulfilled.

This experience is common enough that it should give us pause. It should prompt us to ask if there isn't another kind of preparation that we should be undertaking in our lives, something more than preparing to finish a task, meet a deadline, or accomplish a goal. This preparation has to do with what kind of people we'll turn out to be. Will we be honorable or dishonorable? Reliable or unreliable? Disciplined or undisciplined in our appetites? Truthful or unprincipled? Reasonable or unreasonable - or worse, unable to reason well and wisely Capable of friendship, kindness, and mercy or at length lonely and unloved? Whether you are preparing for exams, writing papers, or having fun - the project of becoming the person God means you to be goes on all the time.

But even this isn't enough. What good is it to graduate from the "to-do" list to the "self-help" list? Life then becomes an endless succession of resolutions we solemnly make to God, our loved ones, our bosses, and colleagues. "I'll curb my intake and lose ten pounds." "I'll work out three days a week." "Honestly, I'll never cheat again." "I'm trying to get in touch with my feelings." Etc.

I don't mean to underestimate the struggle, watchfulness, and practice it takes to become good and virtuous human beings. This is something we prepare for all our lives. We're always a work in progress. Part of your preparation now is becoming convinced that it's worth the life-long struggle, the life-long vigilance necessary to

be and to become a virtuous person. If we would be virtuous, there's certain things we need to guard against. We need to get into the habit of choosing the right thing for the right reason. Yet, in the midst of struggle, might it not occur to us that the Lord is calling us to another kind of life-long preparation – in fact he is calling us to it tonight, in this Church, on the 1st Sunday of Advent.

For as we prepare for the contest called life at some point we will seriously ask ourselves what we want out of life. If we are attuned to what is deep down in our hearts, we will find there a relentless desire to be loved infinitely – a deep desire for God. This desire is the deepest truth about our lives. It is, therefore, a desire that we ignore at our peril for nothing will ultimately satisfy the longings of our heart except friendship with God. Advent is a time for us to be alert, awake, on the outlook – preparing our hearts to open out as never before to a God who comes to meet us way more than half-way, to a God who loves us more than we love ourselves. When the Church celebrates the coming of Christ at Christmas and anticipates the glorious return of the Risen Christ at the end of time, the Church is also alerting us to the fact that Christ is present among us now – and in a very real, substantial, and concentrated form in this Holy Mass. Our hearts cry out for this love yet they need to be prepared to receive it... prepared by prayer, by the sacraments, especially the Sacrament of Penance, prepared by a life of virtue and charity for those who are in need.

This is the preparation that is decisive for the ultimate outcome of our lives. Even as we try our best to wrap up this semester, may we be watchful, prayerful, and full of hope! May God bless you and keep you always in his love!