

Advent means coming. Something great is about to happen or arrive. We are on the advent of the birth of Christ who came into the world, became one of us to free us of the terrible penalties of the fallen behavior of mankind. Advent is also a time for preparation; to prepare and make ready ourselves to receive Christ by knowing him personally. How do we do this? To answer I am going to tell you a story that has enormous significance for any Christian. It's one that tells us what, where and how to prepare for the birth of Christ. I probably told this story a while back but it bears repeating at any time and for any age.

A family living on a well populated Island wanted to migrate to America. The husband and father of the family worked long and hard to save enough money for passage to America on an ocean liner. When it was time to board the ship many friends and relatives came to wish them safe travel and good bye. There were many tears, hugs and kisses, along with well wishes. Before the family was about to board some of the people brought them a bushel of the island's famous cheese to live on while traveling.

They thanked everyone once again and boarded the ship with the cheese. About half way through the two -week voyage the son in the family approached his father and said "father I can't take the thought of another bite of this cheese. I would rather dive off this ship than eat anymore of it." The man looked at his son with understanding and said: "I know how you feel son. Here's a quarter, go up on deck and see if you can find an apple or a piece of some other fruit."

The boy thanked his father and rushed up to the ship's main deck. Some time had passed and the family, father, mother and sister began to worry. "He's been gone along time," said the boy's mother. "Yes" said the father, "I better go look for him." Once on deck, the man marveled at the sight of so many stores. He searched in each of them, the general store, the bakery, the barbershop, the pharmacy and many more. During his search he passed by the ship's huge restaurant and dinning room. "He couldn't be in there," thought the father. He decided to look inside anyway. What he saw stunned him. There before him sat his son at a long table eating a sumptuous banquet. It was all there, soups, salads, roast beef, chicken, lamb, even a turducken, which is a turkey with a duck inside it and a chicken inside the duck, and all manner of vegetables and dessert.

Aghast, his father said, "son, what on earth are you doing," we can't afford this." "Relax," said the boy. "First, here's your quarter back." "What do you mean," said the father. "Father," said the son;" the food comes with the tickets. We get to eat morning, noon and night, and all we want.

The ship can be likened to the church. The people on it are traveling to a desired destination. Everything necessary to survive the voyage is in full supply.

The church can be seen as the arc of salvation. Not unlike Noah's time she travels on a sea of turmoil which is this world and filled with danger.

For some who see the church as boring and a relic of the past they are very mistaken. The boy on the ship wanted to satisfy his hunger and he found it by looking for it. Not only did he find it, one could say his cup overflowed.

Christians should be like that boy. He didn't wait for blessings to befall him; he went looking for them and found them in abundance.

Our relationship with Christ is key to understanding and experiencing fullness in this life. Life is precious and is worth experiencing to the fullest. Many, including Christians, never enjoy this experience because they know not Jesus Christ. He is more than a name. Life lived at its fullest is to rise above the ordinariness of this world and the many evils it contains. Enabling those who know Christ not to allow all that is wrong in this life to influence them.

The Gospel section today is an example of compare and contrast. Contrast is defined as something strikingly different than something it is in close association with. Opening with Jesus informing his followers that horrific events will occur announcing his second coming. We know this as the end times or the eschaton. Then the narrative turns one hundred and eighty degrees by citing a pleasant, pastoral scene of summer and its peaceful surroundings.

The church has the answer to this confusing description. Like the ocean liner her cupboards are not bare, rather she contains everything necessary to develop a deep relationship with Jesus; to satisfy a hunger nothing earthly will: Praying daily, reading Scripture, learning the teachings of the church, a strong devotion to the Eucharist, attending Mass, making a regular self-examination and availing

oneself to the Sacrament of Penance and understanding Grace, reading spiritual books.

Christians who live life to its fullest, are not concerned with ordeals thrown at them, by rising above them in full knowledge that God is in control and has overcome them. For the fully developed Christian if he or she is around for the second coming there will be no fear from what takes place because it will not affect them, for they know their redemption draweth nigh; they are going to a place where summer and its bliss are a constant, that the Kingdom of God awaits them. This knowledge brings with it a peace this world cannot give and it's a promise by the only one who keeps his promises in this world and the next.

There are no short-cuts. We must do the work like the boy on the ship, we must look for it, and we will find it only in the Church, the vessel containing the continual blessings of the Incarnation. The love and protection of Christ himself.