

**HOMILY AT ST. MATTHEW ORTHODOX CHURCH  
DECEMBER 11, 2022**

**COLOSSIANS 3: 4-11  
LUKE 14: 16-24**

**“CHRIST WILL RETURN----BE READY!”**

A little boy was learning how to count. His mother made it a fun thing for him by telling him to always stand by the big grandfather clock in their house whenever it struck the hour. (You're familiar with those tall wooden clocks that chime on the hour as many times as what "o'clock" it is.) His favorite time to do it was at noon-----he loved to count along with the chime all the way up until 12. One day he was doing this counting right along out aloud with the chimes-----9 o'clock, 10 o'clock, 11, 12..... But something had just broken in the clock and it kept on chiming and he kept right on counting along: 13, 14, 15, 16.....and then it shut down altogether. He ran to the next room and excitedly told his mother----“Mommy, mommy, it's 16 o'clock.....it's later than it's ever been before!”

The little guy's statement is always true----it is always later than it has ever been before. We are every hour an hour closer to one of two impending things---either our own personal deaths or the day when Christ come back. The day of His return to our world is always getting closer and closer.

We are in the middle of the Advent season. This season is about two advents----Jesus' first advent when He came to the world at Christmas. And Jesus' second advent, still to come----when He returns to our world in the future. Both the assigned epistle and gospel readings for today focus on His second advent, His return to earth.

In our epistle, in Colossians 3:4, the Holy Apostle Paul writes: “When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.” Note that Paul does not write “*if* Christ appears.....”, but “*when* Christ appears”. St. Paul has no doubt He is coming back

And in our gospel, from Luke 14, the Lord told a parable about a man giving a banquet. And He urges us to be ready for the banquet, to make sure we attend the banquet. The banquet in the parable stands for the day when Christ returns----what a great celebration that will be!

And just a little while after this sermon, we will do what we do at every liturgy---we will recite together the Creed written 1700 years ago which says

about Jesus Christ—“He shall come again with glory....”.

So we Christians have no doubt that the Lord will come back. When? Christ told us in the gospels that we can't know that—it will be a surprise. So it's a waste of time for us to try to predict it,

Over the centuries, there have been many who said they had figured it out----they knew when the Second Advent would be. There were the Millerites in America in the 1840s (quite a few in the Cleveland area) who had it pinned down to a certain day. That certain day came and nothing happened! Then there are the Jehovah's Witnesses who have several times predicted when....and always been wrong.

You might remember a man named Rev. Harold Campion back in 2011. He claimed to have the date figured out and wrote a popular book explaining and predicting. The book came out in the spring and it predicted the end of the world would be that October. October came, October went----the world went on. Did Rev. Campion try to find everyone who bought his book and give them a refund? No, he kept the money, probably laughing all the way to the bank!

Because Christ said we can't know when, then we shouldn't worry about it or focus on when. We should just be ready! Maybe it will be very soon, maybe it's centuries away. But once it starts, it's going to all happen in a big hurry....so be ready!

Some folks in Ireland back in the 1800's, called Dispensationalists, came up with an idea that Christ will actually come back twice. The first time it would be a “secret” and “silent” return. The world would still go on but He would take all Christians up to heaven with Him. They call this the Rapture (try and find that word or teaching in your Bible! It's not there....). And then He will come back in a bigger, public way again 7 years later. And during that 7 years----if you weren't ready the first time and so hadn't been raptured up to heaven, you had your second chance before He came back still another time. Seven years to get ready.

This belief is now hugely popular and believed in by most of our more serious Protestant friends and relatives. But it's not true---The Bible is clear--Jesus will only come back once! And when He does it won't be silent or secret. It will be very, very public---it will be the end of the world. Jesus said in Matthew 24:30----“They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds with power and great glory.” Not secret, but in the sky, on the clouds, in power and glory! And several Bible passages say the angels will be blowing horns as it all takes place. (You have heard about Gabriel and his horn---that

will be the day he really gets to play loud on it!).

So when the Lord comes back, it will be very public indeed, very noisy indeed! And the world as we know it will be over...no time for some kind of second chance. And being we can't know when this will happen, we need to always be prepared.

But what if you are not ready? What if you look into your heart and soul and can tell you're not really ready for Judgement Day? If that is the case (and I'm sure it is for all of us) then we need to get ready right away. We need to change with the help of God. We need to go to Confession-----that's why Advent is one of the usual times of year to take part in that sacrament.

Advent is a good time for self-examination, to make sure we are ready.

A tourist in Italy was visiting a beautiful country estate. It was glorious and exquisitely maintained. He complimented the caretaker on how perfect it was and asked, "Does the owner live here?" The caretaker answered, "Oh, no, he lives far away." "Does the owner stop by frequently to check up on it?" "Very rarely----only 4 times in the last 25 years." "When is he coming next?" "I have no idea...it's always a surprise inspection!" The tourist then said, "Well, you keep it so perfect that it looks like you think he may arrive tomorrow!" The caretaker said, "No, sir, not tomorrow. Today!" ("Pulpit Helps", November, 1979, p. 15)

Should we live as if we expect the Lord's return (or our own death) in 10 years? Or next year? Or tomorrow"? No, like He might return today. Because He might! The whole point is that we can't know. So it's best to assume it will be soon.....and get ready!

If the Lord comes back today (or you suddenly die today) are you ready to stand before God's judgement seat? St. John in Revelation 20 tells us about the day when Christ returns when everyone who has ever lived will stand before God' throne to be judged (John says it will be everyone! He even mentions that people who have drowned at sea will be there....) This could happen at any time. But don't despair about not being ready. Just get ready.

And don't think it's hopeless.....because you have a loving Father, a good Father. He wants to forgive you, He wants to help you get ready. The last thing He wants is that you won't be ready! So accept God's help and turn to Him to get ready.

Use this Advent season to go to Confession to get ready. We priests go also.

I will be calling my confessor priest very soon to make an appointment! Use the sacrament of Confession to pour out your heart to God, to repent of your sins, to start living more fully for Christ. To get ready! It's so much better to deal with our sins in the here and now in Confession than to let it all slide----- and have to deal with them at the final judgement!

The Lord wants to forgive us. He wants to help us. Now is the time to accept His help. Christ will come back. He could come at any time. Let us get ready now!