3rd Sunday of Advent: 12/11/22—5:00 PM; 7:30 and 9:30 AM

I don’t know if any of you is color blind, but, in case you are, please know that I am holding two different shades of purple in my hands; this one is a bluer shade of purple while this other one is a redder shade of purple. Recently someone after Mass, knowing that we used purple during both the seasons of Advent and Lent but also knowing that there are these two shades, asked me if we used vestments of the one shade during the one season while using the other shade during the other season. It was a good question. I said that we here at St. Cletus don’t use differing shades of purple because we only have one set of matching Sunday vestments where the priest’s chasuble matches the deacon’s dalmatic. However, it is still a good question because, according to liturgists, this bluer shade is more in the spirit of Advent while this redder shade is more in the spirit of Lent. Why? Because during Lent, we are more focused on the bloody sufferings of Jesus, but during Advent we are more focused on the darkness before sunrise as we await the coming of the S-O-N to be born among us.

That waiting on the s-u-n to rise as we wait for the S-O-N to be born touches on the very origins as to why we celebrate Christmas at this time of the year. Every year, the pagan Romans celebrated a festival called the Saturnalia. Saturn was the god of agriculture and of time, and the ancients knew that the coming of the winter solstice meant that sunnier and warmer days were about to return. According to the Julian calendar, December 25 was the winter solstice, a fact that the Romans celebrated because it meant that they would experience warmer temperatures, could grow things again, and have food. The Christians, knowing that no one knew for sure exactly when Jesus was born, decided to adopt, or in a sense “baptize,” this pagan Roman celebration of the son god as they celebrated the birth of the Son of God. But enough of this history lesson.

That link between darkness and light is central to our observance of Advent because Advent asks us to consider where am I seeking light? Where am I seeking meaning? Where am I seeking joy?

I’d like to take us back to August 21, 2017. In fact, I have here a pair of glasses I picked up from the St. Louis Science Center with that date stamped on it. As you might remember, on that date, there was a total eclipse of the sun in our area. Since it was not going to be a total eclipse here in St. Charles, I grabbed these glasses and travelled to New Melle, just south of Wentzville, where it was total, and that eclipse was spectacular! What really impressed me was that, at the height of the eclipse, I took off these glasses and noticed how dark it was around me even though it was about noon on a totally cloudless day. It was as if it were sunset; that’s how much that moon reduced the impact of the sun that day. Astronomers tell us that it would take 1.3 million Earths to fill up the volume of the Sun, but astronomers also tell us that the Earth is four times the size of the Moon which would mean that it would take five million Moons to fill up the volume of the Sun.

There is an Advent message for us in all of this. Our God like the Sun is, in a sense, five million times more powerful than we are, but, just our Moon can reduce or obliterate the power of the Sun in an eclipse, so too can we humans reduce or obliterate the power of God in our world. A good question for each of us during this Advent Season is: how am I letting my desires, my habits, my hurts, my passions, my angers, my fears eclipse the power of God in my life and in our world? Think how much more brightly the power of God could shine in our world if you and I would simply let the power and love of God shine through our lives into our world rather than blocking it.