

- High atop Mt. Carmel in northern Israel is a beautiful view of a very interesting part of the world. To the west is the clear, blue water of the Mediterranean Sea. To the north are the mountains of Lebanon. And to the south and east is the plain of Megiddo.
- While it looks like a very peaceful and beautiful area, this plain – which contains the intersection of some of the main trading routes of ancient times – has been the site of many important battles over the centuries.
- In fact historians believe that more battles have been fought here than in any other place in the world.
- And it is in this area where Armageddon is located, which the Book of Revelation records will be the place where the forces of evil will gather to wage battle against Christ and the forces of good at the end of time when our Lord will come to earth once again.
- Looking across that plain a few weeks ago, it was difficult not to think about our Lord's second coming, and indeed that is certainly what the Church is calling us to do at this time in the year.
- Today we enter once again into the season of Advent. While we typically think of Advent as the time of the year in which we prepare for our Lord's coming as man in the Incarnation, it is also a time to prepare for His second coming.
- Our Gospel story from Luke speaks of our Lord's second coming. We are told that the Son of Man will come "in a cloud with power and great glory", and that "there will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on earth nations will be in dismay, perplexed by the roaring of the sea and the waves."
- The theological word we use to describe our Lord's second coming is *parousia*. This Greek word literally means "presence" or "arrival." In secular usage it refers to the arrival of the king or emperor in a city on a royal visit.
- For Christians, the *parousia* refers to Christ's Second Coming or "presence" at the end of history. Throughout the New Testament there are numerous references to it in both the Gospels and the letters of St. Paul.
- Moreover, last week's feast of Christ the King was meant to remind us of the kingly character of Jesus, i.e., that He is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Jesus is the Sovereign King to whom we must all render an account on that last day.
- As Catholics we believe that before Christ's second coming, the Church must pass through a final trial that will shake the faith of many believers and there will be great persecutions from the evil one (cf. 2 Thes 2:2ff).
- Then the *parousia* will occur amid cosmic travail (cf. Mk 13:24ff; Rev 8:7ff, 9:1ff; 2 Peter 3:6ff); the Son of Man will come on the clouds shining with radiant light (cf. Matt 24:30ff).
- Christ's mere appearance will obliterate Satan (2 Thes 2:8; Rev 20:9ff), and the dead will be raised. This will be the definitive triumph of good over evil.
- The great judgment will occur and the hearts of all men will be opened and their innermost thoughts will be laid bare. Each person will then be rewarded or punished according to his works and according to his acceptance or refusal of grace.
- At this time, the world as we know it will end. All creatures will recognize and acknowledge Jesus as Lord. And Jesus will fully establish the Father's kingdom.
- It can be a fearful thing to consider that someday we will all have to render an account of our lives to this King – an account of both the good things and the bad things that we have done.

- Indeed, today's Gospel tells us some people will die of fright in anticipation of what will happen at the second coming. Yet when this happens we are told not to be afraid, but to stand erect and raise our heads because our redemption is at hand!
- In truth, my friends, as Christians the *parousia* should not cause us to tremble with fear, but rather it should cause us to tremble with joy and hope!
- You see, my friends, our king is no ordinary king. Christ the King is a shepherd at heart. And if we truly know this great King as we should, we will find that there is really nothing to fear in Him at all. All that we need fear is our own human weakness.
- As Christians we know that as long as we live on this earth, we are in exile from our true home: Heaven. And Christ is coming again at the end of time to save us, to take us from this land of exile to our heavenly home. He is coming to conquer sin and death forever!
- And Advent is a time of the year that we remind ourselves of these truths and earnestly seek to prepare for this second coming of our Lord, while we also prepare ourselves for the beautiful Feast of Christmas, which celebrates His first coming as a man.
- The way that we prepare for both of these comings of Christ is by learning to love and by striving for holiness. As St. Paul tells us in the second reading today, we must abound in love for one another.
- St. Paul tells us that we are called to be blameless in holiness, conducting ourselves in a way that pleases God, accepting and living according to the teachings of our faith that have been handed on to us.
- This requires that we foster within ourselves not only a knowledge of our Church's teachings and a deep desire to conform our lives to those teachings, but also that we cultivate a sincere contrition for those times that we have failed to live out the truths of our faith.
- It is for this reason that during the season of Advent the color violet becomes prominent in our liturgies, for violet symbolizes contrition for sin and a desire for repentance.
- And so as we enter once again into this hopeful and joy-filled season of Advent, as we anticipate our Lord's two comings: both His coming in the Incarnation and His second coming in the *parousia*, let us take the time to truly prepare ourselves spiritually.
- Make the time to really pray, and when you pray, meditate on the mystery of the Incarnation and the mystery of Christ's second coming at the end of time.
- And go to confession, especially if you haven't been in awhile. There is no better way to prepare your soul for God's manifold gifts than by cleaning out all the sin that weighs us down in life.
- My dear friends, our King is coming, and He shall not delay! Therefore, let us prepare ourselves well by cultivating within our souls a true repentance for our sins and by striving for genuine holiness.
- And have no fear of Him. While it is true that our Lord is the mightiest of kings, He is also the most gentle and merciful.
- May Jesus Christ be praised, now and forever. Amen.