



SAINT THOMAS CHURCH FIFTH AVENUE
in the City of New York
The Reverend Canon Carl F. Turner, Rector
www.SaintThomasChurch.org

Sunday, November 28, 2021
The First Sunday of Advent

Litany and Solemn Eucharist
11am

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A Sermon by
The Rev. Prisca Lee-Pae, *Associate for Pan-Asian Ministry*

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A Sermon for the First Sunday on Advent, 2021

It is so grateful to be here with you all. My name is Juyoung Lee-Pae, and Prisca is my baptismal name. Let me tell you a little more about myself since it is my 1st Sunday with you.

I was born in Korea and lived there for over 30 years, and I came to the states 14 years ago.

I was raised in a faithful family in Korea.

Especially my grandparents of both sides were the great models of prayer life.

When I slept over at my grandparents', I used to hear them praying, reading the Bible and singing hymns at dawn. Even though I was only a small child, I was moved to tears.

My maternal grandfather was a doctor of Korean Traditional medicine and every morning he prayed that all the sick be healed.

It's almost 40 years ago. But still I remember when I heard that prayer, I was worried.

I thought 'Oh, no! He is going to be poor if he doesn't have any patients.'

So, when I had breakfast with him, I told him about my worries.

And he said to me with a gentle smile, "Don't worry. It's alright. Our Heavenly father feeds us."

My paternal grandfather was an elementary school principal. And his nickname at school was 'English gentleman.' When he passed away, we found his old and tattered book of Common Prayer. And that is the most precious and proud heritage for us as his descendants.

His lower body was paralyzed, and he spent more than ten years in his bedroom before he passed away. But we never saw a gloomy look on his face. He filled his days with prayers holding on to the book of common prayer like a monk in a monastery.

Would they have imagined that their personal meetings with God would be publicly revealed by their granddaughter in a big church in the heart of New York City?

Now all of them have passed away except one. But the legacy of their faith and devotion made indelible marks on my life and continues to live on as inspiration.

Our faith gathered here at this moment is an extension of the eternal life of the faithful, their legacy living in us.

I believe that there has been the faith of somebody who lived a life of prayer and devotion in this church, and of important people who have guided you to the path of faith in your respective lives.

And although we do not know how our prayer life will affect someone in the future, our life of faith will be passed on to somebody without us even knowing.

Like this, to pray is to stand before God without knowing how long it will take or what kind of fruit it will bear. And it's making great history in places we cannot imagine; at moments we cannot foresee.

It's never easy to do something if we don't know when, where and what kind of outcome that we will get. That's why in today's gospel, Jesus urges us to be alert at all times to pray, to stand before the Son of Man. Faith is believing and hoping for things that are not seen.

In Paul's letter to Romans he says, "Who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience."

The church year begins with the coming of Christ. And it is up to us to prepare and wait.

Depending on the relationship with the one who is to come, the hearts of those who are waiting will be very different. And depending on their hearts, the preparation of the waiting person will be very different.

The belief that makes us to stand up and lift up our heads, when the whole nation is trembling, when the powers of the heavens are shaken, is not built on one day.

That's why Jesus is telling us to be alert all times and pray. A person who would not normally stand before God will not be able to stand before God on the day that suddenly comes.

Being alert and praying at times feels like it's ok even if we don't do it right now, and it's easy to get pushed out from our priorities, but it is the most important thing for our salvation and it should be our top priority. That's why Jesus is emphasizing it and He Himself has demonstrated with His life.

To stand before Jesus at this moment is to stand in front of the 'mirror of eternity' that Saint Clair spoke of. That is, I stand before the One who sees my soul as it is.

When we stand in front of this mirror, we do not need to decorate ourselves, nor does it work.

We cannot hide or decorate ourselves before God, and more importantly, we don't have to.

We can enjoy infinite freedom in front of God who accepts, understands, and loves us as we are. We can taste the joy of liberation and salvation.

And we, who have tasted that joy, can become beings who can accept, understand, and love others in the same way.

It is said that what the Desert Fathers acquire at the end of their solitude is the ability to **empathize**. So, when many disciples came to visit, they were able to offer comfort and advice from the heart.

The time of prayer in front of the Absolute, the time when our soul is fully accepted by God, changes us and makes us to go out into the world as a person who can accept others with empathy.

As we heard in today's Gospel, we have tasted what it's like for all nations to tremble with fear through the pandemic. But it was also a time when some of us had to fall into another fear. Some suffered another pandemic of fear.

The fear of being a victim of violence because of being Asian and the fear we felt as we faced the reality revealed by the death of George Floyd, who had to take his own breath saying, "I can't breathe!"

In the midst of this pandemic, when neither vaccines nor masks can help, I have experienced how difficult it is to stand up and lift up my head.

I knew it was something that I could never do in my own strength and will.

I've learned it is something that I can never do without being alert and praying.

And I have realized how important it is for someone who is alert and prays, to hold hands of neighbors and raise them up.

I believe that the Pan-Asian ministry is possible here because this church is the body of Christ that has been alert and prayed.

Words cannot express how grateful I am to be able to participate, in the precious history of this church that keeps opening a new door to the world through prayers.

May the Holy Spirit help us to fill this year with prayers that transform ourselves, prayers that restore the world to its fullness as God has intended.

Let me conclude today's sermon with the words of St. Clair.

Place your mind before the mirror of eternity!

Place your soul in the brilliance of glory!

Place your heart in the figure of the divine substance

And, through contemplation, transform your entire being into the image of the God head itself, so that you too may feel what friends feel in tasting the hidden sweetness

that, from the beginning, God Himself has reserved for His lovers.