

**Advent Liturgy, December 3, 2006, Remarks by University President Rev. Scott R. Pilarz, S.J.**

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ADVENT LITURGY HOMILY  
DECEMBER 3, 2006  
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Earlier this year, The University published a small book as part of our celebration of the Jesuit Jubilee year that comes to a conclusion tonight on the Feast of St. Francis Xavier. The book was entitled *A Season of Fire and Light*. And tonight, the First Sunday of Advent, marks the start of another season of fire and light as we wait in anticipation for the coming of the Lord at Christmas and then again in glory. As one special Jesuit year ends, another liturgical year begins. There is a blessed circularity and spiritual rhythm here and one that is deeply Catholic. We celebrate and cling to our signs and symbols, year in and year out, because they give us life by pointing beyond themselves to the deeper reality of God's love. As the travel writer Barbara Harrison puts it: "I am a Roman Catholic. I need and want the necessary discipline of praise, the rhythm – the great swinging movement of dark to light – of the liturgical year and, most of all, the Sacrament of the Eucharist, life's food and blood."

Tonight we participate in that movement from dark to light with our wreath here and our tree on the Commons. These symbols express the sentiments, the commitments of our University community and the Church of which we are a part. We are called to be people of fire and light, called in the oft quoted words of St. Ignatius to "go and set the world on fire." Tonight as our Jubilee ends and advent begins, we recommit ourselves to that great commission at Scranton.

That commission that calls us to be people of fire and light, is explained in tonight's readings, starting with the promise discussed by the prophet Jeremiah. It's God's ancient promise to the people of Israel. God will act on our behalf by ultimately dwelling among us. But notice that God will not act alone. We are called to partner with God by promoting justice. Three times in one short paragraph the words "just" and "justice" fight for our attention. Jeremiah sounds like a professor at the end of a semester, hammering home the most important point: to be people of fire and light, we must act for justice. And as a university community we don't do that in a simple-minded sense. Instead, we engage the world's complexities armed with arts and sciences, struggling to discover and then do God's will. If we listen to the Prophet Jeremiah, we hear that the first sound of this season of fire and light is a call to promote justice.

The second sound of the season, according to St. Paul, is the call to do more, a call to do better: "Finally," he writes (again sounding like a professor at the semester's end, trying to sum it all up) "Finally, brothers and sisters, we earnestly ask and exhort you...that as you received from us how you should conduct yourselves to please God – and as you are conducting yourselves – you do so even more." For us on a Jesuit campus this should have a familiar ring. It sounds a lot like what St. Ignatius means by the Latin words *magis* – a restless desire for excellence. We can never rest on our laurels or stay content with the status quo. Out of gratitude toward God, we are spurred on ever to excel, asking always in the words of St. Ignatius, "What have I done for Christ? What am I doing for Christ? What will I do for Christ?" Not easy questions of course, but they, too, are part of the sound of this season.

And finally, there is the sound of Jesus voice in the Gospel: The advent wake-up call, as it were: stand up straight, raise your heads, be vigilant at all times. Pay attention to the signs of the times." And it's almost as though Jesus is talking directly to a campus community, and this time less like a professor and more like a Dean of Students: "Beware that your hearts do not become drowsy from carousing and drunkenness." Sounds like it's not all that far from Nazareth to Mulberry Street on a Saturday night. Pay attention, Jesus says, to the signs of the times and let those signs shape your heart and soul. Take notice of signs from the sublime to the ridiculous: the wreath, the tree, the inflatable Santa on the red house roof and all the decorations on the stone house porch next store. Let them remind you that this is the season of fire and light at Scranton. The sounds and the signs of this season call you to recommit yourself to the University's mission and identity, your mission and identity: women and men for others, women and men of fire and light.

In this Christmas season, on this first Sunday of Advent and feast of St. Francis Xavier, patron saint of pilgrimages and journeys, I pray that all your comings and goings here at Scranton are grace-filled and charged with the grandeur of God.

Happy Advent. Merry Christmas. Amen.