Today we celebrate the first of four Sundays of Advent. Advent invites all Catholics and Christians to prepare for Christmas. The mood of Advent is joyful, hopeful preparation. Notice that of today’s readings tell of joyful, hopeful promises made and promises kept. Jeremiah proclaims, “the days are coming says the Lord, when I will fulfill the promise that I made to the house of Israel and Judah.” The Psalmist sings, “God shows sinners, ... teaches sinners his humble way.” St. Paul prays for his Thessalonians, “May the Lord make you ... abound in love.” Jesus in the gospel exhorts us, “Be ready to stand before the Son of Man.”

This pre-Christmas season, everybody will become very busy with material activities: buying gifts, baking cookies, decorating our homes and offices, sending Christmas cards, partying, writing papers, studying for final exams, making travel plans to go home or to do service over the holidays; some students are traveling to Panama, Nicaragua, Philly, or Camden. In this season of oftentimes frenetic activity, take time for spiritual preparation for Christmas. Make private time for yourself and God. Be at Sunday Mass. Try to attend daily Mass sometimes. Practice lectio divina or Bible Study, or Eucharistic adoration. Just try to find some quiet time with God, when you can pour out your heart to him. Campus Ministry, besides all of its usual activities, will conduct the annual Christmas Tree Blessing, the evening of Lessons and Carols, its Advent Penance Service, and Blessing of the Brains. During these four weeks of Advent, please try to make spiritual preparation for Christmas Day.

What exemplifies how to make spiritual preparations during very busy times? Probably the Blessed Virgin Mary best symbolizes this season: she was eight months pregnant, feeling and praying for the child within her womb, waiting for this grace-filled child. Who else exemplifies joyful, hopeful preparation? I suspect that young couples preparing for marriage, ... or young couples preparing for the birth of a child. These couples have countless things to do in preparation for their wedding or their baby. And yet they know that the most important thing is spending time just “being” with and for each other; not needing to do or say anything else. That is a good analogy for us for making spiritual preparation despite all the busy-ness of getting ready for Christmas.

The joy we will experience at Christmas is related to the joyful, hopeful, spiritual preparation that we will make during these four weeks of Advent.