

Some 40 members of my family gathered at my brother's for the meal on Thanksgiving Day. The number has grown. Several are in their 80s; several are under the age of 2. My sister-in-law says her vision of Thanksgiving dinner is having the whole family sit together at one table with plates, silverware and cloth napkins. My brother told her – with 40 people coming, you just have to let go of that vision.

Thanksgiving is as much about people as it is about food. From now till New Year's, we have food to prepare, shopping to do, cards to mail – but above all, we have people to see.

The family is the backbone of our society. Strange as it sounds, the more we love our family, the more we love those outside the family. Once we develop a habit of love, it never stops. So, as Christmas approaches, people sacrifice not just for those they love, but for total strangers. They give to charities. They stuff Salvation Army buckets at Wal*Mart. They adopt a needy family through our ministerial alliance. They buy a gift that a prisoner will present to his child. We celebrate Christmas with family, but we also help total strangers, just because they are people in need, and they deserve our love.

St. Paul writes this wish to the Thessalonians: "May the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all." He wants them to love one another within their community, but also to love those outside it. Paul believed that the second coming of Christ was near. The Thessalonians were already conducting themselves to please God, but now, he says, they should do so even more. If Christ is coming soon, we should love one another, Paul says, "to be blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his holy ones."

That is why we hear this reading on the First Sunday of Advent. The Church invites us to spend Advent thinking not just of the coming of Christmas, but of the coming of Christ. If you knew the second coming of Christ would be this December 25th, how would you spend the next 4 weeks? That would make a good Advent. We would probably do a lot of the things we are already planning to do, because they show our best selves, ready to love everyone – family and stranger alike.

As we prepare for Christmas this year, let us prepare for Christ,
and live blameless in holiness before our God.