

- When Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden, our world was plunged into darkness. Man, created in God’s image and likeness – and given by God everything necessary to be happy and holy – turned his back on his Creator.
- The effects of this willful act were devastating, and we have been suffering with these devastating effects ever since. Primary amongst the terrible effects of the original sin is concupiscence, which inclines all of us to sin – even when we know better.
- And our sins are both debilitating and isolating. Sin hobbles us and makes us less than who God created us to be, and sin isolates and separates us from God – for God and sin are mutually exclusive. They cannot exist together, and so, there can be no sin in Heaven.
- Thus, any venial sins we die with must be atoned for in Purgatory before we enter Heaven, while any mortal sins we die with will separate us from God for all eternity.
- It can seem impossible to overcome our sins – and on our own, it is. None of us, by sheer force of will, can overcome our sins, especially our long-habituated, grave sins. But being both all-loving and all-powerful, God has never been content to leave us in our sins.
- Thus, when the fullness of time was come, God the Father, Who is all-loving and all-powerful, sent His only Son, born of a virgin, to be our Savior.
- When this Christ was born, the dark clouds of sin that had enveloped the world since the days of Adam and Eve, were torn asunder and Light entered the world once again.
- So as Christians, we must learn to trust both in God’s love for us, and in His omnipotence – confidently trusting that He has both the desire and the ability to free us from our sins that can eternally estrange us from Himself.
- And as we meditate on these important attributes of our Lord, we must all consider how we respond to His love and power. In this, we are given help today by St. Paul, who calls us to live in the light of grace and to throw off the darkness of sin.
- St. Paul tells us that *the day is at hand*, and therefore *it is the hour for us to awake from sleep*. Rising like the sun at His birth, Jesus has dispelled the darkness of sin and death, and He continues dispelling the darkness of our souls the more we allow Him to master us.
- And throughout our Church’s history, we have celebrated those courageous men and women who have allowed themselves to be well mastered by Christ, who have trusted in God’s love and omnipotence to dispel the darkness of their souls. These, of course, are the saints.
- Interestingly, it was this very passage of St. Paul’s that moved the great sinner, Augustine of Hippo, to become one of the greatest of saints.
- As St. Augustine was coming to understand the truths of our Faith, he struggled to commit fully to Catholicism because of his attachments to the sins of the flesh. In fact, he is credited for the famous line: “Oh God, make me chaste. . . but not yet.”
- But eventually Augustine tired of his enslavement to the flesh, and so he courageously determined to cast away the chains of his enslavement in one fell swoop.
- As he made this resolution, St. Augustine heard a voice like that of a child saying to him: “Tolle et lege: take up and read.” As he reached for the Scriptures, his eyes fell upon this very passage from St. Paul that we hear today.
- St. Augustine stated that, at that moment, there was “a clear and constant light infused” into his heart such that “the darkness of all former doubts was immediately driven away” (cf. *Confessions* 7, 12, 28-29). He came to know and trust in both God’s love and omnipotence.

- And thus, determined to live a life of holiness, and aided by God's grace, St. Augustine, who once lived as a lustful reprobate, was transformed by God into one of our greatest saints. And the same thing can happen with each of us, and Advent is a perfect time to start!
- This transformation begins with our faith in God's love for us and in His power to save us from our sins. But the hard work of cutting out all of the serious sin in our lives requires both our courageous efforts to avoid sin as well as God's grace.
- To receive the grace necessary to overcome any habitual, grave sins, we must pray daily and have frequent recourse to confession and to receiving Holy Communion. Fasting, going to Adoration, and praying to saints who also struggled with sin is also very efficacious.
- And we have to avoid the occasion of sin. So, for example, if watching TV leads you to into an occasion of sin, have the courage to stop watching television! And trust in God's grace.
- So many of us lose hope when we struggle and fail to overcome our sins. Yet, so often, we fail because we lack the necessary courage to renounce our sins, and because we do not trust God enough. Yet, the season of Advent gives us every reason to trust in God.
- Advent draws our attention to Christ's coming as man and His second coming at the end of time. If our Lord is loving enough to become one of us to save us from our sins, and if He wields the omnipotence to conquer sin and death, should we not trust Him completely?
- Sadly, so many people completely ignore this beautiful and penitential season of Advent by allowing themselves to be consumed by materialism, such that what is supposed to be a time of waiting, of hopeful expectation, and of fasting and penance, is turned into a time of greed, gluttony, and revelry in worldly things,
- Like Esau who sold his birthright to Jacob for a mess of pottage, so many people quickly sell out the transcendent gifts of faith that are promised to us in Advent for the ready-made yet hollow satisfaction of temporal things. This is sad – and spiritually deadly.
- For those who place all their hopes in the things of this world do not know the love of the Lord, nor is it likely that they will experience His power to save them from their sins.
- So, as we begin our annual vigil for the two-fold coming of the Light of the World, let us strive to throw off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light. And let's do so with great confidence in God's grace.
- Regardless of how we've failed in the past, let's earnestly resolve to renounce our sins, especially our serious ones. Let us courageously resolve to avoid what leads us to sin.
- Through daily prayer, fasting, the Sacraments, and works of mercy, let's invite God's healing and transforming grace into our lives – with great confidence in His love and omnipotence.
- And instead of busying ourselves with the temporal and worldly concerns this time of year always brings, let us devote ourselves to preparing for Him whose kingdom has no end, for in Him we shall find our salvation.
- Brothers and sisters, we are all sinners scarred by concupiscence. None of us can ever hope to get to God on our own. In focusing on Christ's coming as man, we are taught just how much God loves us.
- And by focusing on His coming again at the end of time, we are taught that Christ exercises power over all things – and thus He has the power to free us from sin, if we let Him.
- As we go forth into this holy season, let's meditate on these divine attributes, and seek to live in the humility and contrition of the saints so that we, too, might invite Christ to exercise His love and omnipotence in our lives.
- St. Augustine of Hippo, pray for us!