

## **Homily: 29th Nov 2020. 1st Sunday of Advent**

Readings Year B: 1st: Isaiah 63:16-17; 64:1.3-8; Psalm 79;

2nd: 1Cor 1 1:3-9; Mark 13:33-37

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As we start this new liturgical year, moving from the devastating year just gone, some Advent words like waiting, expecting, a coming, all have such relevance in this pandemic time. We were no doubt glad to know we are in tier one. But watching, waiting, expecting, all mean being or getting ready. More than anything this year longing for a vaccine, or an end to the virus has been our dearest wish and prayer for months. The end it seems is in sight.

As ever the cycle of readings at Mass and the Divine Office keep us fixed where we should be, on God, but moving always towards him, be it to celebrate once again his birth in Bethlehem, and prepare for the graces that he will give us this year, but as we do that looking forward also to his 2<sup>nd</sup> coming again in power and majesty at the end of time. These two comings we keep in mind all through this short season.

St Bernard says; “We have come to know a threefold coming of the Lord. The third takes place between the other two. They are clearly manifest but the third is not. In the first coming the Lord was seen on earth and lived among us in the days when, as he himself bears witness, they saw him and hated him. In his last coming ‘all flesh shall see the salvation of our God,’ and, ‘they shall look on him whom they have pierced.’

The other coming is hidden. In it, only the chosen see him within themselves and their souls are saved. In brief, his first coming was in the flesh and in weakness, this intermediary coming is in the spirit and in power, the last coming will be in glory and majesty.’

This intermediary coming, where we are now, is like a road leading from the first to the last coming. In the first coming Christ was our redemption, in the last he will appear as our life: in the intermediary coming he is our rest and consolation.”

In that rest and consolation we can reflect on the readings for today. The 1<sup>st</sup> from Isaiah is in the form of a prayer that instructs us in penitential attitudes that are proper to Advent. It begins by expressing a problem; the problem of our sin; “why do you let us stray from your ways and harden our hearts.”

The mystery of human iniquity, who can understand it? We ever try to make sense of all that is going on, and all we can say is ‘Oh, that you would tear the heavens open and come down. Come Lord and save us, redeem us, do not delay.’ We pray these and similar words during this season of Advent, for in Jesus Christ this cry is definitively answered. Christmas is the celebration of the awesome deed of God we could not have hoped for. He sent his son to us in meek humility.

Our Psalm, written towards the end of the 8<sup>th</sup> Century BC when Israel is under threat from Assyria, (what’s new?) and is a plea to God for help in the wake of disaster. It was probably prayed in the Temple by the southerners on behalf of their brothers and sisters in the north (see how relevant it all is for us today) If the 1<sup>st</sup> reading has ‘Lord our Father,’ the psalm has the familiar ‘shepherd of Israel,’ enthroned on the Cherubim throne, come to help us. Another familiar image the Vine in the next verse, visit us, protect us, and in v.3 ‘let your hand be on the man you have chosen, whom you have given strength;’ who else but his own beloved son, whom we long to welcome?

The Corinthian community, reflected in the 2<sup>nd</sup> reading, was exuberant and turbulent: Paul has to modify its boasting and censure its quarrelling and divisions. This is the opening of his letter, giving thanks sounding a positive note for what is to follow. God’s initiative is at work among them by his Spirit and he remains faithful to his gifts, but the Corinthians have to recognise that their stance must be one of alert expectancy; they have not arrived, but are waiting for the full realisation of God’s kingdom, and the second coming, that some thought would almost be tomorrow. They, like all of us must wait in expectancy, meanwhile remaining faithful and blameless until the Lord comes.

Three times in the gospel Jesus says to his disciples stay awake; stay awake, and then what I say to you, I say to all; stay awake. We never know.

Most of us reflect that this time last year none of us would have thought what 2020 would bring. No, never room for complacency. The 'stay awake' is urging us not to sleep through the opportunities life gives us to discover God in our midst: to pay attention to the signs of God's unmistakable presence in our lives, and so to live life expectantly not as a death sentence but as a gift from God.

The Christian disciple's life is centred on watchfulness and prayer, to the love of God in every joy and sorrow, every pain and trauma, every victory and setback before us.

Certainly events and lockdowns of 2020 have given us time for more prayer, thought and reflection. Our lives are an Advent, a prelude, to the life of God to come. While confronting us with the reality that our lives here are finite and fragile, these days of Advent also assure us of the mercy of God, who is with us in the midst of all the struggles of our everyday Advent journey to the dwelling place of God. We are pilgrims on a journey to God, who says he is the way, the truth and the life.

Make the early Christian prayer, virtually the last words in the Bible, our own, Maranatha, Come Lord Jesus. Through persecution and terror the early church held on to the faith that God reigns. **So he does.**

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