

Homily (notes) from Canon Philip Dyson
Sunday 28th November 2021 - 1st in Advent (Year C)

Readings (Year C): 1st: Jeremiah 33:14-16. Psalm: 24.

2nd: 1 Thessalonians 3:12 – 4:2. Gospel: Luke 21:25-28. 34-36.

‘As we await the blessed hope and the coming of our saviour Jesus Christ.’ Words we hear at every Mass, but are the special theme of Advent, the season of waiting. The Church’s year ends on the note of Christ’s Kingship and Second Coming.

This is continued into the new Advent, and a theme particularly dear to the earliest generation of Christians. ‘Maranatha, come Lord Jesus,’ they sang at every Eucharist.

Has our expectation grown dim as the centuries between his first coming at Bethlehem, and his final coming seem to lengthen? Yet sombre world events across the globe remind us of our need for a saviour and the hope he generates.

Yesterday (today) in the Office of Readings St Augustine says “Let us sing Alleluia here below while we are still anxious, so that we may sing it one day there above when we are free from care.

He goes on ‘Why are we troubled here? Do you not expect me to be troubled when I read, ‘Is not our life here on earth full of trial? He goes on to develop his theme, leading to our daily prayer, deliver us from evil.’ But here too, amidst the dangers and the trials, we must sing Alleluia, ‘For God is faithful and will not let you be tempted beyond your strength’ as St Paul says.

In the gospel today Jesus seems to be giving his own worst-case-scenario advice to his followers. And he doesn’t just say “If you should find yourself in this situation...” he tells them they definitely will find themselves in this dire situation. Sir David Attenborough amongst many others gives us all dire warning for the future.

The gospel passage can seem frightening- and confusing too. Scholars have long discussed what event Jesus is actually speaking about. Is it the end of the world? Some of the language certainly sounds like the end-times language of the Apocalypse/Revelation. Luke here paints a picture of the fear and distress of people when they live under threat of cosmic disaster- especially the destruction of the universe.

What is important for us today is that Jesus offers his followers a survival strategy for all worst-case scenarios. Jesus warns us not to lapse from our prayers or from our confidence in him. No matter how bad things get the followers of Jesus can be sure that they will have eternal salvation. Jesus promises liberation for all who follow him. The Psalm response we pray ‘To you O Lord, I lift up my soul.’ Which was also the entrance antiphon.

St Paul gives similar advice to the people of Thessalonica in his letter, part of our 2nd reading, which follows from Jeremiah in the 1st reading speaking of the virtuous branch of David who will come to save his people. Paul’s advice is sound for us as it was for the early Christians. Our lives as Christians will not be well lived unless we keep progressing by striving to love one another more and to be more like Christ every day.

Using Christ’s language: “Stay awake: praying at all times for strength to survive all that is going to happen.”

Canon Philip Dyson

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