

Homily (notes) from Canon Philip Dyson
3rd December 2023 - 1st Sunday of Advent

Readings (Year B): 1st: Isaiah 63:16-17,64:1,3-8. 2nd: 1 Corinthians 1:3-9. **Gospel:** Mark 13:33-37.

Advent is always for us a time of waiting, of expectancy and therefore of hope.
Sadly an instant society doesn't know or understand waiting.
The themes of **waiting** and **hope** are found in each of today's readings.

Isaiah in the 1st writes to the Jewish people in exile in Babylon. Babylon is like a wilderness for them as they long for their homeland.

He offers them **hope** that God, who seems distant, will save them once more and lead them into freedom. Their **waiting** in exile will come to an end.

The scriptures offer **hope** for the experience of **waiting**. God will intervene in the lives of those who are waiting -in exile, in sickness- waiting to see God face -to-face.

This is beautifully picked up in the Psalm, which is part of a national lament evoking by the powerful metaphors of Shepherd and Vine the close relationship of God with his people.

When St Paul was writing to the Christians in Corinth in the 2nd reading, there was an expectation that the Second Coming was imminent.

The Corinthian community were exuberant and turbulent: Paul had to modify its boasting and censure its quarrelling and divisions. They expected Jesus to return very shortly as he had promised. They had to recognise that their stance must be one of alert expectancy; they have not arrived, but awaiting, as is everyone, since the full realization of God's kingdom is with the Second Coming.

As they **waited**, some were easily distracted, tending to loose heart and fail to trust in God. Paul reminds them that the Lord will keep them steady and guiltless as they **wait in hope**. **Hope** can be described as faith that looks forward to the future.

The opposite of hope is despair, with its bitter fruits of cynicism, cold indifference and sense of failure. Advent calls us to remember constantly that we live in the time between the first and second coming of Jesus.

Jesus tells the disciples to 'be on their guard; stay awake. An instruction he repeats in the chapter following today's gospel when on the Mount of Olives with Peter, James and John. Three times he tells them to stay awake, and three times they betray him by falling asleep, just as he foretold in this parable.

And at the end of this parable Jesus makes it clear that it is not only his disciples he is warning: "and what I say to you, I say to all: stay awake. That means being conscious of what is happening around us. Staying awake is about being alert. It is also about patience – the patient **hope** and expectation that things will change.

Christian **hope** means more than having a cheerful outlook.

It is founded on a unique reality, the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. That mighty event, which came after Jesus' self-sacrifice on the cross, is the triumph of his love and his victory over death, the last enemy.

The risen Christ is the first fruits of the new age to come.
Because he, the head of the Church, rose, his followers will also rise.

At his second coming on the last day, Jesus will come in majesty to judge the world and to establish the kingdom of God in glory.

He teaches us what we pray every day “thy kingdom come.”

While we **wait**, patient and alert, we must also **pray**.

Those who pray will always live in a world full of expectation and **hope**. Prayer helps us to see the world, humanity and ourselves through the eyes of God.

Jesus foresaw our temptation to indifference and unbelief. We stay awake, not in a frightened way but in a sense of always being alert to the truths Jesus spoke and embodies.

He knew we would face adversity and persecution. His second coming will not be the sudden return of someone who has been absent but the new appearance of someone who has always been present with us.

We meet Jesus in a personal but unseen way in our reading/hearing of his Holy Word, and especially the gospels.

In our prayers and in the sacraments esp. in the Eucharist, during which we daily pray ‘as we **await** the blessed **hope** and the coming of our Saviour, Jesus Christ.

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