

## **First Sunday of Advent December 03, 2017**

Isaiah 63:16-17; 64:1.3-8; 1 Corinthians 1:3-9; Mark 13:33-37

Today we begin the season of Advent. Advent means waiting or coming and we wait for the coming of someone we love. During this season we focus on waiting for the Lord, waiting for the coming of Jesus. We have the three fold waiting. We know that Jesus has already come in history and we remember that during the week before Christmas our waiting changes to waiting for our celebration of the birth of Jesus. We also wait for his final coming at the end times when he will take all to himself. We also experience his daily coming into our life through the Eucharist, word of God and also in the various persons and events of life. Waiting is something very important in the life of the human person. Anytime we wait we do so because we expect something to happen or someone to come. In our daily routine of life we wait for something to take place, maybe we wait for a friend, for a bus or train, and there is the eagerness within us that makes us look forward to something new that will take place. During Advent we look forward to Jesus who will come in a total gesture of love: God becomes man. Today's readings assure us that the Lord is coming. But an individual has to be alert and must be on watch. The first two readings of this liturgical year bring us face to face with a God who is Father and with the reality of our own sinfulness before him. We have wandered away from him but he is faithful and has sent his own Son to free us from our blame. Prophet Isaiah makes a prayer of yearning asking God to come and save us from sin. Paul in the second reading stresses on the fidelity asking people to remain faithful to Jesus to the end. The Gospel of Mark invites all to a spiritual vigilance. He tells us all to be ever alert so that the coming of the Son does not find us unprepared for no one knows the day or hour of his coming.

The First Reading of today shines in the grace of God. The passage opens and closes by addressing God as our Father recalling the Exodus episode where God called Israel his first born. It echoes Divine love that is forgiving towards those who live righteously. In their need the people of Israel imagine that their God has abandoned them, retreating to realms or place beyond their reach. When Isaiah saw Jerusalem hit bottom in ruins he pleaded for God to rend the vault of heaven and come back down to be among them. The people confessed their guilt and admitted that God was indeed right to punish them. They understand that they have given to Yahweh their God plenty of reason to stay away. They feel that they are sinful, unclean and full of guilt. At the same time they wonder how God

could have let things go this far. Like a leaf, the sinners are taken away by the wind to fade away at a distance. Having turned from the ways of the Lord, no longer calling on his Holy Name, the sinners are left to their own iniquities. The prophets have been in fact telling them that God has been calling them all the time and they have refused to listen to him. The imagery that appears all too seldom in the bible, the people speak themselves as the clay and of God as the potter. They are ready to be shaped by the hands of God into perfect vessels that God always wanted them to be.

In the second reading of today Paul tells the Corinthians that the grace of God flows abundantly towards those who walk their living faith in Jesus Christ. Those who walk their living faith, they are enriched in Jesus, in speech and knowledge of every kind, not lacking in any spiritual gifts for the betterment of the Church. Through Jesus, the faithful are strengthened to the end of their worldly lives so that they will be blameless before God the Father on the Day of Judgment. One may wonder how he could be blameless before God on the Day of Judgment since all are sinners. Those who walk their living faith by the grace of God the Father and the power of the Holy Spirit in the Most Holy Name of Jesus will not have their sins of the weak flesh held against them because they will not be judged according to the law of men but rather according to the law of God. Being spiritually minded, they have received the indwelling Holy Spirit who protects them against the grip of the evil one. Those who walk by the flesh, setting their minds on worldly things, they shall be judged by the law of sin. Those who walk in faith through Jesus Christ, setting their minds on spiritual things, they shall be judged according to the law of God. Those who persevere in their living faith, God will no longer remember their sins. He will blot out the transgressions of those who strived in their living faith for His own sake. As such, they shall be blameless before God the Father on the Day of Judgment.

In the Church's celebration of the mystery of Christ, during the closing Sundays of the past liturgical year we looked forward to the final coming of Jesus. Jesus is going to come in glory to judge all people and take the righteous for their reward. Today we are beginning a new church year and we have a marvellous mixture of the end and beginning of the universe and of man. The first Sunday of Advent invites us to be ready to receive the Lord who is going to come. This is the time of waiting and we await the one who is certain to come to us. We must be ever alert and ready so that the coming of the Son does not find us unprepared. Advent is a

season for us to renew our hope because of the coming of Christ. As we reflect upon the period of waiting for the first coming of Jesus at Bethlehem, and as we begin to prepare for his coming now at Christmas, we await his final coming into our lives. In other words, we celebrate his coming in history, his coming in mystery, and his coming in majesty at the end time. The church teaches us that the Lord has already come. Knowing that he has already come as a child born of Mary gives us confidence. Amidst the overshadowing material preparations for Christmas, we begin our spiritual preparation for Christ's coming by way of the season of Advent.

The season of Advent begins with a sombre warning from Jesus to his disciples, to be watchful and to be alert. Here Mark warns the Christian community against all eschatological expectations that can easily go out of hand. There is still work to be done here on earth before the final coming of Jesus. Today's Gospel is speaking on the level of the future and present comings of Jesus. The key word placed before us is 'readiness'. He calls on his disciples to be on their guard and to stay awake, because they never know when the time will come. Here Jesus gives a parable about a man travelling abroad. He does two things: he gives various responsibilities to his servants to be carried out while he is away; and he warns the doorkeeper to be vigilant. This, in a way, covers the two parables found in the Gospel of Matthew: the parable of the 'talents', when the servants were told to make productive use of what they had been given by their master, and the parable of the wise and foolish virgins who had to be fully prepared and remain in readiness for the coming of the bridegroom. Jesus tells each one of us to stay awake, because no one knows when the master of the house is coming, evening, midnight, cockcrow, dawn. If he comes unexpectedly, he must not find his chosen ones asleep and not at all prepared. Therefore he asks all to stay awake and alert. Readiness is not only for the end but also for the daily stream of experiences that make up our ordinary day. Jesus is always there.

In the Gospel of today we have the summons of Jesus to be watchful and alert. But the disciples wanted to be certain when the end of the world would come. Jesus while responding to them did not get specific about time but his central teaching is that he will return in glory to usher in the end of the world. However, his summons is not filled with urgent anxiety. There is no call to fanatical behaviour of any kind. If anything, Jesus encourages a calm seriousness placed within the context of realism. The fact is that only God knows when the

final coming of Jesus will be and on the part of human persons it is necessary to be constantly vigilant. Whatever the signs or events human persons may say that they are pointing to the final end, they are mere speculations. Thus the issue is not whether the Lord will come again but to be prepared for his coming at all time. They reveal to us that God is faithful, His Word being unchanging. They teach us the end result of righteousness. They tell us that although we presently dwell in our present sinful physical bodies that seek to oppose what is spiritual, we can still be blameless before God on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. These are all very powerful statements that deserve to be reviewed so that they may be understood.

Jesus in the Gospel speaks of the here and now. He calls his disciples to focus on the immediate events that will take place in the near future. He gives the example of the faithful and trustworthy servants who behave loyally during the absence of his master. They have their responsibilities and they know what they are supposed to do. If they are faithful, they will carry out all those tasks given to them whether the master is present or not. When the master does eventually return, the faithful servants will be in good stead because they have done what they were supposed to do. They have done their task with diligence and loyalty. Every moment has an eternal significance and so the disciple should be on guard. The servants who remain casual in their behaviour and make a guess about their master's return from journey may well be found wanting in their behaviour. The point that Jesus makes here is clear and simple. Live each day as if it were the final day of the master's arrival from his journey. This is not done with high anxiety and uncertainty, but with the calm conviction that whenever he master comes, the servant will be ready. This in fact is the message of Advent.

Today's readings touch upon a number of spiritual issues. They reveal to us that God is faithful, His Word being unchanging. They teach us the end result of righteousness. They tell us that although we presently dwell in our present sinful physical bodies that seek to oppose what is spiritual, we can still be blameless before God on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. These are all very powerful statements that deserve to be reviewed so that they may be understood. The Gospel Reading reminds us that while Heaven and earth shall pass away, the Words of the Lord shall not pass away. Every promise that He has made shall be fulfilled. God shall prove His faithfulness to all by His Divine actions. But there is a catch. Everyone must remain consistent in his living faith. He must keep alert for

no one except the Father in heaven knows when the Son of God shall return or when each individual person will be called to experience his physical death. Jesus asked his followers to keep awake and wait for the Lord and with this he meant that one must be spiritually active and consistent. The daily coming of Jesus into our lives is the process by which we deepen our understanding of who Jesus was and is and become more and more identified with his vision of God and of the meaning of life. With this identification we are not only ready but eager to meet and be one with our God. We wait for the coming of Jesus in our everyday living.

Thus Jesus gives us the warning: Watch. Do not be caught unawares. On his part this is an eminently positive admonition and the guiding step. The Christian who listens to the words of Jesus lives in permanent expectation of his coming and will welcome him as the long-awaited Master arrives from his journey. Secondly, to be on watch is to be aware each day, through prayer and reflection that the 'today' of salvation is here and now. It is to adopt every measure to live always in the grace of friendship with God, so that were the final call to present itself today. We today can thank God for all that Jesus has brought and continues to bring into our lives, the countless helps he gives us to lead a good life. We do that best by constantly being aware of his presence and action in the people around us. We are helped in our journey of life by so many people, most of whom we do not know, have never seen. As Christians, just as Prophet Isaiah promised, have a new hope and a new light. Our waiting for Jesus is a moment of joy and expectation and not a tension filled situation. Therefore here in the season of Advent we live by faith, walk in hope and are renewed in love so that when Jesus comes at the end time to be our judge, we shall not merely know him, but come to him as a friend.

A tale is told about the Buddha, Gautama (563-483BC), the Indian prince and spiritual leader whose teachings founded Buddhism. This short story illustrates that every one of us has the choice whether or not to take personal offence from another person's behaviour. It is said that on an occasion when the Buddha was teaching a group of people, he found himself on the receiving end of a fierce outburst of abuse from a bystander, who was for some reason very angry. The Buddha listened patiently while the stranger vented his rage, and then the Buddha said to the group and to the stranger, "If someone gives a gift to another person, who then chooses to decline it, tell me, who would then own the gift: The giver of the gift or the person who refuses to accept the gift?" "The

giver," said the group after a little thought. "Any fool can see that," added the angry stranger. "Then it follows, does it not," said the Buddha, "Whenever a person tries to abuse us, or to unload their anger on us, we can each choose to decline or to accept the abuse; whether to make it ours or not. By our personal response to the abuse from another, we can choose who owns and keeps the bad feelings."

Well known preacher and writer Norman Vincent Peale tells us of his life experience. When he was young he was walking down the street with his father who himself was pastor, they confronted a beggar who was dirty and smelling. He came to Norman and touched his hand and asked for some money for food. Norman seeing the man dirty and poorly dressed with tattered clothes recoiled and brushed him aside. His father told him that he must respect the man and not behave in this way. The boy replied that after all he was worthless and dirty and he could do nothing more. His father told him that in this world there is no one worthless for all are the children of God. Then he took out one dollar, all he could afford and gave to the boy and said give to that man and tells him that it is in the name of Jesus he is giving this gift. Norman refused at first but on his father's insistence he ran after the man and gave him saying this amount he is giving in the name of Jesus. The man looked at him and gave him a big smile and said: I thank you my son in the name of Jesus. Norman says that in this genuine smile of the man who looked worthless he found the real face of Jesus which he never forgot in his life.

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