

FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT B/2005

When a mother expects a new baby, all the members of the family prepare seriously such an event. They look for all the stuffs they need to welcome him and even modify the house in order to create more space for this new member. Some times, the parents prepare psychologically the kids to the coming of their new brother or sister. As we do with our human families, so does the church. The time of Advent is a time where the Church reminds us that the Lord is coming and we have to prepare him the way in our heart. Of course, Christ has already come into the world at his incarnation, and he is in our midst in an invisible way, but we are still waiting his second coming at the end of time. After that Christ has ascended into heaven, we are in the period between Pentecost and the second coming; it is an era of expectation, a time of hope, a period of longing for Christ to come and bring his Kingdom to its complete fulfillment.

All the readings of this first Sunday of Advent invite us to be vigilant and attentive, ready to receive the Lord when he comes again to free us. In the 1st reading, the prophet Isaiah reminds us that God is a “father” and a “redeemer”. There is no situation that he cannot improve. Nobody is so enslaved by sin that he cannot be freed and redeemed. That is why the people of Israel confronted with the reality of suffering and humiliation consecutive to their exile in Babylon cry to God for help and liberation. “Why do you let us wander from your ways and harden our hearts”? “Return for the sake of your servants”, says Isaiah?

This cry of help and hope in the Lord is based, first of all, on his fidelity. God cannot deny himself; if in the past he has intervened in many ways in favor of his people, why could not he do it now? Such a hope finds also its foundation in the special relationship between God and Israel. God is a Father to Israel and to us all; he is like a potter who has made the clay, fragile, without consistency and solidity. How can he reject the work of his hands? This is the reason why the people recognizing his situation of sinfulness before the Lord ask for forgiveness. The text states clearly: “We are sinful, unclean people, polluted and withered like leaves...” Referring to our own situation and weaknesses, who cannot recognize himself in such a description?

That is why we need to be set free by the Lord. Advent is a time we call upon the Lord so that he may come to convert us and to create a new heart in us, capable of following his ways and precepts. However, today’s Gospel tells us that the “redeemer” comes, but we have to be vigilant in order to be able to receive his salvation, because we do not know the time he will come, we do not know the place and the circumstances in which he will find us. Whoever sleeps will remain slave of sin, and will not be liberated.

Today’s parable is highly relevant, because it reminds us what we have to do in order to meet the Lord when he comes. As a matter of fact, the master has physically left us, he has put his servants in charge, each with his own task, and he

has told the doorkeeper to stay awake, to be on the alert for his return. At this point, we have to recognize that we are both servants, each with our own task, and doorkeeper on the alert for Christ's return. We work and watch. We strive to make the Kingdom a reality and we are constantly looking out for the coming of Christ.

Of course, we are most of us better at working than at watching. Working is something we all know about, we do it every day. Maybe we went through some laziness in our lives, but once we realize how much was to be gained in this life by work, we found a new focus. A lot of us are very good at working; maybe some of us are too good, and we work to the exclusion of most things. But working for the Kingdom is not just any other work. It is actually quite subtle and it is not a question of just putting more energy in. It is about making connections between peoples, it is about saying the right thing at the right time; it is about being in the right place for a right action, it is about touching the lives of others, it is about reaching out, it is about loving, caring, healing and forgiving. These are things we have to do in Advent time.

The master did not ask us only to work, but also to watch and wait. What we are watching and waiting for is Christ's coming. But it is in the very nature of Christ to be always coming, always arriving in a lot of different ways and in many varied guises. For those with eyes to see, he comes walking by daily. For those who recognize him, Christ is always around. And this is what watching is all about. It is developing some very particular skills so that we are enabled to recognize him in his many guises. We need to train ourselves to be alert to his disguises, to notice the signs of his arrival, to be aware of his presence. And most of all perhaps we need to be able to enjoy his coming, especially his coming to us in prayer and through the Eucharist.

Let me finish by saying that You and I may not have turned away from God in dramatic ways. Still, we have done smaller things. If carried to their logical conclusion, they would result in a denial of God. During Advent we need to alert ourselves to the apparently smallest matters which can have enormous consequences for our relationship with God and our brothers and sisters. The small things can sometimes lead to a terrible end. We can overcome major challenges, but small things can bring us down. Let us ask the Lord to help us to be alert like the Christians of Corinth so that he may not find us sleeping. God bless you all.



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