

## **First Sunday of Advent C/2009**

We live in a culture of fast food and instant message, where everything is at our hands as quickly as we want to obtain it. We want everything to be fixed as quickly as possible. In such a culture, waiting becomes annoying and sometimes a real hassle.

The time of Advent we start today reminds us that life does not always run its course according to our parameters and the mentality of our culture. We have to wait, and wait patiently, the coming of Christ. We are the people of the promise made to us about the return of Christ. But we do not know when, how, and in which circumstances he will come back. If so, we have to wait in vigilance and readiness until the promise is accomplished. That is what all of today's readings try to tell us.

The first reading of the book of Jeremiah reminds us of God's promise to Israel to send them a savior. That savior will be from the dynasty of David. He will lead his people with the spirit of David by bringing righteousness and justice in the land. In those days, Judah shall be safe and Jerusalem shall dwell secure.

In spite of relative calm and political prosperity brought about by some kings in the country, Israel went again and again through slavery and exile until God decided to send his own son into to the world in order to set the world free. That promise has been fulfilled when Jesus took flesh and became a human being. Jesus suffered and died on the cross for our sake and for our salvation. After his resurrection, he ascended into heaven; but he promised us to come again at the end of time.

This time is a time of awaiting his return in glory. The Gospel of this Sunday of Advent focuses on that final coming of Jesus. It highlights especially the signs and the tribulations that will accompany that important event. It states that the powers of heaven will be shaken. Evident signs will appear in the sun, the moon and the stars. On earth, people and nations will be afraid and perplexed when they will see and hear the roaring of the seas and the waves.

These signs, however, should not be taken literally, as some peoples do and have done, for instance, when hurricane Katrina and Tsunami happened. These signs are an indication to us of the occurrence of God's manifestation at the second coming that will transcend human history and its laws. What they teach us is that human history has a goal; it goes somewhere, that is, the encounter with Christ our savior.

Therefore, we have to understand that we are not living in a settled situation. Everything is not given totally and completely in this world. The life we live now here on earth is just temporary, in preparation of what we will be in heaven. We must live our lives in a permanent state of expectation of Jesus' coming. We must live in the certainty that our actions will determine our fitness to appear in the presence of God.

That is why, whatever might happen at the end of time and at Christ's second coming, those who abided closely in Jesus will never be surprised. They will never miss the opportunity to see him and to rejoice in his presence forever. Jesus reassures us that when all those signs

will begin to happen, we have to stand erect and raise our heads, because our redemption is at hand. But the only way to prepare to meet God is to live with him every day. The shock of the last day will not be for those who have lived in such a way that they have become God's friends, but for those who have rejected him in their lives on earth.

In that perspective, the bad news for us would have been: being surprised by Christ's event without being sufficiently prepared. For that reason, even if it is true that we do not expect Christ's second coming right now, we have, however, to be alert and vigilant. That is why it is equally true, and important, to understand that Christ can call us anytime and at the moment we least expect. That moment represents the great day for each one of us for which we have to prepare ourselves seriously.

All that explains the warnings of Jesus in the Gospel so that our hearts might not become drowsy and we fall into drunkenness and anxiety of daily life. Jesus recommends us that we be vigilant and pray so that we have the strength to escape tribulations that are imminent and to stand before him. In other words, we are accountable about the outcome of our life before Christ the judge.

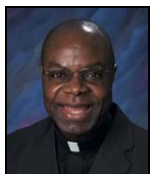
It is the same message that St Paul communicates to us in the second reading. The context of this reading refers to the situation in which the Christians of Thessalonica were living. In fact, the Thessalonians were expecting Christ's return during their lifetime. As the delay of his return was evident, many lost patience and did not live blamelessly.

It was at that time that St Paul prayed that God might strengthen their hearts, so that they might be holy at the coming of our Lord Jesus. All that should be visible in their conduct as they try to do what they should to please God and avoid sins.

As for the Thessalonians, Advent provides us an opportunity of examining our lives and actions. It invites us to repentance and change of our attitude before God and our fellows. We have to check carefully and see where we have failed, what we have to change, and how we have to put it right in order to prepare our hearts to welcome Jesus. We have to remember that although Advent refers to the incarnation of Jesus as well as to his final coming in glory, the Lord comes every day in our lives and in our world. Only those who are prepared can recognize him now and, later, share joyfully in his glory.

Let us ask the Lord to help us make Advent a time of conversion and repentance. May he give us the courage to change our lives and to conform them to his word so that one day we share in his joy and glory! God bless you all!

**Jeremiah 33, 14-16; 1 Thessalonians 3, 12-4, 2; Luke 21, 25-28, 34-36**



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Contact: [www.mbala.org](http://www.mbala.org)

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