

1st Sunday of Advent A/2010

Today we begin the four weeks leading to the feast of Christmas and which we traditionally call the time of Advent. Advent is a time of preparation of heart and assessment of life in order to welcome the Lord who comes to meet us and to be ready for his event.

The readings of this first Sunday, while they remind us of the task of preparing ourselves for this event, they invite us to watchfulness, readiness and vigilance.

The first reading of the book of Isaiah describes a vision the prophet had about the future of Jerusalem. The prophet says that time will come when Jerusalem will be the center of the world's life to which all the nations of the earth will come to worship. At that time, Jerusalem will be the source of divine Law and the divine blessing of peace for the whole world. Nations and people will stop fighting and Jerusalem will find its true way of life by walking in the light of the Lord.

When we revisit such a prophecy with the life of Jesus Christ in the background, we realize that it is in his person and action that it has been fulfilled. It is in Jesus that all the nations of the earth have been gathered together in one people of God. It is Jesus who, with his message of love, has taught us to transcend conflicts, suppress wars and sow peace in the human heart and in the world.

That is why Advent is not only about the event of the return of the Lord; it is also about the task of building the world according to Jesus' dream until he comes again. By preparing for the Lord's coming time and time again before Christmas as we enter into Advent, we prepare for Christ's final coming which will be a decisive moment for human history and for our own life.

All that helps us understand the insistence we find in today's Gospel as Jesus reminds us of the importance of the day of the Lord that will come on us like a thief in the middle of the night.

The comparison Jesus uses with the story of Noah is more than eloquent; it speaks for itself. At the time of Noah, indeed, while he was preparing himself for the flood that was about to come, the rest of the population of the earth was unaware and immersed in its business without any concern. The real concern of every one was eating, drinking, marrying and giving in marriage until the day all were swept away by water.

Why is Jesus telling us this old story? What Jesus is pursuing with this reference is to remind us that whatever might be the state or the success of our business, it should not distract us from the truth that there is a God and that the issues of life and death are in his hands. Therefore, we have to be prepared so that any time he calls us, whether it be at morning, at midday, at evening or at night, he might find us ready. That is why the Gospel insists that we stay awake because we do not know on which day our Lord will come.

Another point Jesus would like to make is that right now we realize that that day will be a time of separation from our routine and things we usually do and which, very probably, we like a

lot. In this regard, human experience has taught us that there is no more bitter separation than that for which people have not been prepared and they expected the least.

The third point Jesus would like to bring to our awareness is the fact that the lack of watchfulness is a source of misery and disaster for whoever does not prepare himself. For instance, the thieves do know send a message of warning that they are about to burglarize a house. What they do is simply to play with the mind of the householder by taking him by surprise. If that is the case, a wise master of the house who has valuables in his home must constantly watch guard. That is what we have to do in this time of the awaiting of the Lord.

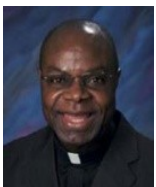
By telling this parable Jesus is not pushing us to live in fear about what will happen to us tomorrow. What he wants is that we come to realize that we have to use the present time in order to prepare his future coming by being faithful to our commitments and by being ready.

Before concluding, let me tell you a story tale of three fresh devils. Three young devils were about to be sent on earth for training. Satan the chief asked them, "Explain to me your plans and how you will succeed in this mission". The first said, "I will tell people on earth that there is no God". Satan said, "You cannot deceive them with such a plan, because they all know that God exists". The second said, "Well, I will tell them that there is no hell". Satan answered, "You can deceive no one that way, because they all know that if they sin they go to hell". The third said, "I will tell them that there is no need to hurry". Then Satan said, "That is great. That way you are sure that you can ruin them, because they will live in the delusion that they still have plenty of time".

The point of this story is that if we want to be saved, we have to do something. St Paul gives us good recommendations in this regard in the second reading. This is the time we have to awake from our sleep. Time has come for us to leave behind us the work of darkness and put on the armor of light. This is the time of conducting ourselves properly as in the day, and not in orgies or drunkenness, promiscuity and lust, rivalry and jealousy. Time has become shorter than ever, because every day we are nearer that time.

Let us, then, pray that we do not put off for tomorrow what we can do today for our salvation. Let us take advantage of this time of Advent to change what we can in our relationship with God and our fellows. Let us work for our conversion in this time of Advent. May God bless you all!

Isaiah 2, 1-5; Romans 13, 11-14; Matthew 24, 37-44



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