

First Sunday of Advent C/2012

The readings of this first Sunday of Advent focus on the return of the Lord Jesus. They remind us that the Lord will come back again. Therefore, we have to prepare ourselves for this important event of our life.

The first reading of the book of Jeremiah describes the promise God made to the people of Israel to put a descendant of David on the throne of Israel. The difference between his reign and those which came before him will be in his concern for justice in the land and safety for the inhabitants of Jerusalem.

What is behind this text is the idea that God is faithful and keeps his promise. That promise opens up the perspective of hope, because whenever God promises something, he does it for the good and peace of his people. Another idea in the text is about the restoration of Israel to its political integrity through the work of a king that God will send for his people.

This text allows us to understand what is at stake in today's Gospel as Jesus talks about the end of the world and the coming of the Son of Man. First of all, Jesus speaks of the signs that will appear in the sky at that time as the powers of heavens will be shaken. All that will bring fear and fright on many on earth.

However, the people of God should remain serene in the knowledge that their redemption is close. Moreover, they should be careful not get lost in drunkenness and anxieties of daily life. The reason for such prudence resides in the fact that that day will come as a surprise on earth for everybody. That is why Jesus invites his disciples to be vigilant and prayerful at all times so that they might have the strength to escape the coming tribulations.

What do we learn from this Gospel? The first point I want to highlight is about the drama of the culture of "fast-ness" [speed]. What do I mean by that? In fact, we live in a culture of fast food and instant message, where everything is at our hands as quickly as we wish to obtain it. We want everything to be fixed as quickly as possible.

In such a culture, waiting becomes annoying and sometimes a hassle. We see it easily at the airport, at the bus station, in the supermarkets, and so on. Many are really impatient and do not like to wait. And yet, the time of Advent we start today means specifically a time of waiting for the return of the Lord. How will we reconcile the culture of "fastness" [speed] and the spiritual virtue of waiting?

We should never forget that the true meaning of life does not run its course according to the mentality of our culture. We have to wait, and wait patiently, the coming of Christ. We live by the promise of the return of Christ. But we do not know when, how, and in which circumstances he will come back.

The second point I want to highlight is about the attitude we need to have in this time of waiting. In fact, as we have to wait until Christ shall come, how shall we be? The attitude we need is vigilance and prayer. Why? Because, we never know when it can happen. That is the reason why Jesus insists that our hearts might not become drowsy or fall into drunkenness and anxiety of daily life.

Does it mean that we have to live in fear? No; it means only that we have to be prepared and be ready so that whenever the end comes up, we are fit for it. That is the only way we cannot be surprised or miss the opportunity to rejoice with Jesus when he comes again.

What is the consequence of this entire situation? The consequence is that it is in our interest to understand that our situation on earth is not completely settled. In that sense, it is clear that our life on earth is temporary, transitory and in preparation of what we will be in heaven.

Therefore, we have to live in the expectation of Jesus' coming. At the same time, we have to remember that our actions today are very important, because they will determine our future with Jesus. All the same, we have a certainty that if we do so, we will share in Jesus' joy. That is why Jesus reassures us that when we see the signs of the end happening, we have to stand erect and raise our heads, because our redemption is at hand.

All that seems interesting and easy to say, but does it not make the world obsolete and all the things we do in this world useless? Why shall we work so hard for the things when we know that they are transitory and unimportant for our eternal future?

Well, the spiritual wisdom of the Bible tells us that what we do in the present age prepares us for the world to come. That is why we have to take seriously what we do now because by doing it we anticipate the world to come. After all, we will not be judged at the end of time according to vague criteria, but according to the criteria of how good we were in following Jesus' principles when we were still on earth.

Only this vision can allow us to understand the insight of St Paul in the second reading, when he is recommending us to love one another, to live blamelessly in holiness and to conduct ourselves in a way that is pleasing to God. That is why Advent provides us with an opportunity to live in God's manner and to change what is changeable in our lives before Jesus comes back. Let us take time to reconsider how we live now so that we have the chance to share in the joy of heaven. Let us pray in asking God the grace of change in this awaiting of the second coming of Jesus. May God bless you all!

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



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