

First Sunday of Advent C2018

The readings of this first Sunday of Advent talk about the return of the Lord Jesus. They remind us that the Lord will come back again. They invite us to prepare ourselves for this important event of our life.

The first reading describes the prophecy of Jeremiah. It announces God's promise to the people of Israel to put a descendant of David on the throne of Judah. It also announces the term of his governance, as it will be based on the pursuit of justice and the attainment of safety for the people and the land.

What is behind this text is the idea that God is faithful and keeps his promise. There is also the idea that God will restore Israel to its political integrity and achievement of peace throughout the land.

This text allows us to understand what is at stake in today's Gospel as Jesus talks about his return. First of all, the Gospel mentions the speech of Jesus in which he speaks of the signs of the end of time. It highlights in particular the signs that will appear in the planets as the cosmic powers will be shaken at the coming of the son of Man. Then, it announces the fear that will reign on the earth because of those happenings.

After that, the Gospel speaks of Jesus' appeal of his disciples to serenity, rectitude and faithfulness. Finally, the Gospel refers to Jesus' invitation of them to vigilance and prayer so that they might be able to escape the tribulations to come.

What do we learn from this Gospel? Today I want to talk about the merit of awaiting. What do I mean by that? Let me explain. I call awaiting the attitude of expecting something to happen, an event to occur or data to be fulfilled, as opposed to rushing things or losing patience. For instance, at the post office, I may be waiting my turn to come so that I post my letters, or at the bus station, I may be waiting for the bus to come so that I go shopping. But, if I have invited a friend for dinner, I am not waiting for him in the same way I do at the post office or at the bus station. I am waiting by being busy, by preparing something to eat for the time he is in.

In that sense, waiting has a double reference, namely passive and active. It is this second sense, I am talking about. In the biblical sense, the attitude of awaiting is, indeed, rooted in the spiritual virtue of patience.

I want to put this virtue in contrast with one of the trends of our culture that runs the risk of impacting our spiritual life. 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, when the line at the confessional becomes too long, etc. Many are really impatient and do not like to wait.

And yet, the time of Advent we start today means literally a time of waiting for the return of the Lord. How will we reconcile the culture of speed and loss of patience in which we live and the spiritual virtue of waiting?

In fact it is good for each one of us to know that life does not always run its course according to the mentality of our culture. We have to wait, and wait patiently, for the

coming of Christ. We live by the promise of the return of Christ. But, the thing is that we do not know when, how, and in what circumstances he will come back.

If that is true, then, we have to be vigilant and prayerful in this time of the awaiting of the return of the Lord Jesus. Why shall we do so? We have to do so, because, we never know when it can happen and how it will happen. That is the reason why Jesus insists in the Gospel that our hearts might not become drowsy or fall into drunkenness and anxiety of daily life and that day may surprise us like a trap.

Does it mean that we have to live in fear? No; it is not a question of living in fear. It means only that we have to be prepared and stand 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.

The consequence to draw from such a vision is that our situation on earth is not completely settled. In that sense, our life on earth has to be considered as temporary, transitory and in preparation of what we will be in heaven and with Jesus.

Therefore, we have to live consciously 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 this 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 of this world 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 so 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.

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!



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

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