

First Sunday of Advent A/2019

The readings of this first Sunday of Advent talk about the return of the Lord. They remind us that every single new day brings us closer to that prophetic day. They invite us to vigilance and awakening so that we are not surprised.

The first reading describes a vision that Isaiah had about the future of Jerusalem. It shows that Jerusalem will become the center of the world, the source of divine Law and of blessing of peace for the nations. It also shows that Jerusalem will become a light for the world to the point that the nations of the earth will come to the city in order to worship God.

What is behind this text is the idea that Jerusalem is an integral part of God's plan of salvation for the world. There is also the idea that God's choice of Israel has a character of exemplarity for the nations of the earth. The last idea is related to the vision that Jerusalem is a foundation for the knowledge of God and a source of blessing for the nations of the earth.

This text allows us to understand the point of today's Gospel as Jesus speaks of the return of the Son of man. First of all, the Gospel opens up with Jesus' comparison between the time of Noah and the return of the Son of Man. It shows that the return of the Lord will be a surprise as it was at that time. Then, it recalls the historical context that preceded the flood by showing how people were busy with their own business and concerns until the flood surprised them.

After that, the Gospel invites to prudence and awakening because of the unknowingness of the time of the return of the Lord. In the end, the Gospel reports Jesus' warning that the disciples should be prepared lest they are surprised.

What do we learn from this Gospel? Today I want to talk about the danger of sleeping into routine and the importance of awakening to faith. What do I mean by that? Let me explain. In fact, when people ask of me, how my day was, I globally refer them to the things I did in the course of the day or give them the details of what I did.

If I am asked the same question about tomorrow, my answer will not be different. Again I will refer to my schedule and talk about the things I plan to do. In the end, the answer to this question will mostly refer to the routine of things I am used to doing and which I probably project to do for tomorrow. Even if it is true that a new business can bring some change in my schedule, my line of speech will remain the same.

When we are used to operating this way, it is unlikely that we will include in our plan the possibility of "the end of time" or "the thought of the last activity of my life". In that sense, the routine becomes the modus operandi of our life. It dictates everything we do and the way we approach the future.

But, if our plan does not include the possibility of the end of time, it means that the routine is dangerous and deadly, not that it kills, but rather in the sense that it lets us sleep in lethargy of things we are used to doing. Jesus says that at the time of Noah, people did exactly the same thing until the day they were surprised by the flood.

So, what is the point of Jesus in telling the story? The point of Jesus, indeed, is not that we live in fear because the end will come. It is neither that we abandon our daily activities because they lead us into routine. His point, on the contrary is that we become aware of the fact that on earth we are sojourners and strangers. Therefore, whatever might be the success of our business or whatever we do, we should not forget the importance of our eternal life. As we work hard to succeed in our business, we should do the same for our eternal salvation.

In that sense, our business should not become a distraction or an obstacle that prevents us from thinking about our eternal life. That is why it is wise to stay awake and not sleepy in the routine of things we do. Moreover, we have to prepare ourselves each day for the encounter with God in so far as we do not know the day or the hour of the coming of the Lord.

That encounter is imminent because every single day that comes up makes it closer and closer. As St Paul says, time has become shorter than ever, because every day brings us nearer to the end. For that reason, we have to leave behind us the work of darkness and put on the armor of light. We have to conduct ourselves properly as people who know what they are waiting for and how they can get it.

That is the appeal of Advent: to be awake, prepared and watchful. The example Jesus gives about the person who was robbed in the middle of the night by surprise by a thief, without him being prepared, aims at awakening us to the imminence of the coming of the Lord.

Now, let me finish by telling you the story of three young devils who were on internship and about to be sent in mission on earth. Their Master asked them to prepare their plan and to present it to him. The first said, "Well; my plan will be simple, but efficient. I will tell them that God does not exist". The master replied, "Well, you cannot deceive people that way, because they all believe that God exists".

Then, the second came. He pretended too that his plan was efficient and simple. But, instead of talking about God, he said that he will tell people that "hell does not exist". The master answered that it was a weak strategy because everybody on earth knows well that if they sin they will go to hell.

In the end came the third. He was very determined and serious about succeeding in his assignment. He said: "Well; I will tell them that they do not need to hurry up about their conversion". The master appreciated his strategy a lot, because, he said, "that way they will keep living in the illusion that they still have time."

If we do not want to be deceived, let us act now and let us not put off for tomorrow what we can do today for our salvation. May God bless you all!

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



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