

Homily First Sunday in Advent 2021

As a 6year-old child at primary school Advent was an exciting time and it heralded the period of preparation for Christmas. I remember back in that small hall at St Peter's Primary, which seemed colossal at the time by the way, Mrs McGowan at the school piano leading us in the Advent hymn:

Come, O divine Messiah!
The world in silence waits the day
When hope shall sing its triumph,
And sadness flee away.

O Thou, whom nations sigh for,
Whom priest and prophet long foretold,
to break the captive fetters;
Redeem the long-lost fold.

Sweet Saviour haste;
Come, come to earth,
Dispel the night and show your face,
And bid us hail the dawn of grace.

O come, divine Messiah!
The world in silence waits the day
When hope shall sing its triumph,
And sadness flee away.

Just singing it carries me back to those innocent days when the Birth of Christ was reason for great celebration and a magical time for children eagerly awaiting Christmas Day with its lights, decorations and of course presents beneath the Christmas Tree.

As we begin a new Liturgical Year and the Season of Advent I am reminded of my old Liturgy Professor Fr Franco Sottocornola. Franco is a world renowned liturgist who is now a missionary in Japan at the centre of Interfaith Dialogue. He defined The Liturgical Year in lectures as: 'The praising and thanking of God in the RELIVING the events of Christ's life in time and space using signs and symbols. So, we are not just remembering or commemorating Christmas but, through our Liturgical celebrations, we ARE THERE with Joseph and Mary as they journey to Bethlehem, we ARE THERE in the stable at Mass on Christmas Eve/Day. We ARE THERE on the Feast of The Epiphany as The Three Kings visit the newly born Christchild. The Liturgy makes these events present to us NOW IN 2021

Today's First Reading foretells the coming of The Messiah to The Chosen People 'a virtuous branch from the root of David who will practice honesty and integrity. In those days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in confidence.' Jeremiah, like many of the Prophets including Isaiah, instilled a great sense of expectation that the Messiah would come and that the people should prepare for his advent.

St Paul in his letter to The Thessalonians urges the fledgling Christian Church to live worthy lives ready for the second coming of Christ. 'May he confirm your hearts in holiness that you may be blameless in the sight of our God and Father when Our Lord Jesus Christ comes with all his saints.' Thus Paul reiterates the need for vigilance and preparation for the coming of The Saviour

St Luke in The Gospel continues this theme of preparation and vigilance reminding us that we know not the hour of Christ's coming and urging us: 'Watch yourselves lest your hearts be coarsened by debauchery and drunkenness and the cares of life.....Stay awake and pray at all times for the strength to survive all that will happen....'

As we enter this holy season of Advent let us both prepare ourselves for Christ's Birth in that poor and humble stable in Bethlehem and for Christ's Second Coming, whether it be personal or universal, at the end of life or indeed of time. Let us do so by leading virtuous lives, prayer and selfless love of our neighbour particularly the sick, the poor and the marginalised. We can then on Christmas Day with childlike humility approach the crib with the memory of that other hymn of years past:

Come, come, come to the manger
Children come to the children's king
Sing, sing chorus of Angels
Stars of morning o'er Bethlehem sing