

Homily First Sunday in Advent 2023

In today's Readings from Holy Scripture, we see a very subtle move away from the 'end days' and judgement to a sense of hope and expectancy as we enter the season of Advent and preparation for Christmas. Every child loves Christmas and I was no exception. I used to love it when Advent arrived and my Mum would fetch out the first of the decorations, The Advent Wreath. Week by week the candles would be lit, until all four flickered signifying the imminent arrival of the Christ Child on Christmas Day. The home-made Christmas crib would remain without the baby Jesus and The Magi and only on Christmas morning and The Feast of The Epiphany would these figures be placed on the straw covered floor of the open stable. The anticipation and hope of Christmas was palpable during this 4-week period of preparation.

In the First Reading this anticipation and hope of the Lord's Coming is heightened as The Prophet Isaiah continues to plead with the Lord: to look down from Heaven to see the plight of His people, urging God to show His presence and His might; Isaiah then asks the Lord why He remains distant from the people; Isaiah finally implores God to remember that He is the Chosen People's divine Father and Redeemer. God answers these questions with a promise of a return from exile and the Advent of the future Redeemer-Messiah.

In Mark's Gospel the Evangelist urges us to be ready and prepared, awake and watchful for The Lord's Coming during this Holy Season, "So stay awake, because you do not know when the Master is coming, evening, midnight, cockcrow, dawn; if he comes unexpectedly, he must not find you asleep. And what I say to you I say to all: Stay awake!"

You can imagine Our Blessed Mother's longing for the birth of Jesus. Yet her immediate preparation for the arrival of The Christ Child was to think of her elderly cousin Elizabeth who was also expecting a divinely announced son, John the Baptist. Mary puts aside her own needs, the prospect of wagging tongues and village scandal and goes at once to assist her kinswoman in the hill country of Judea. She stays with Elizabeth for three months looking after her and being of service to her. As we light the first candle on our Advent wreath today, let us be filled with great anticipation and heart-filled pregnant hope for the coming of the Christ Child and let us prepare ourselves in humble service of the needy in our parishes and in so doing proclaim with Mary:

My soul glorifies the Lord, my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour, for he has with favour on his lowly servant.