

OUR LADY STAR OF THE SEA WEYMOUTH
HOMILY FOR THE FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT (C)
2ND DECEMBER 2012

Jer 33.14-16; 1 Thess 3.12-4.2; Luke 21.25-28, 34-36

I don't know about everyone here but I'm already getting excited. We start Advent today and so start to look forward to Christmas. I bet some of the children are excited even if their parents aren't yet. You know, most of us spend a few weeks preparing for Christmas, for the birth of Jesus. Have you ever thought about the prophets and patriarchs, they spent centuries longing and praying for Christ to come? And yet here we are, able to celebrate this event every year!

But Advent isn't just about Christmas and the birth of Jesus. There are 2 reasons we keep this season of Advent. Yes it is to celebrate Jesus first coming, i.e. Christmas, when he came in weakness and lowliness; but it's also to direct our hearts and minds to his second coming which he will celebrate in all his own power. You may, or not, have noticed that Advent is sandwiched between the Feasts of Christmas and Christ the King (last week). This may seem a little strange, but just think; if we are going on a journey to another town, we need to know where our destination is, or at least prepare our route how to get there. We know what our final goal is. Similarly, our final goal is God, so Christmas in a way is just the start; his second coming is where we are journeying.

We need to know and understand that just as Jesus came as a baby in the flesh, so now, if we remove all barriers, he is ready to come again to us at any moment and make his home spiritually within us (letters from St Charles Borromeo). So, just as we prepare for Jesus at Christmas our readings today remind us to have our hearts prepared NOW.

For a moment think how if we hold a little baby doesn't it make us want to love it, even if not ours? It's an amazing thing that is, simply holding a baby triggers a response of love. Also, if this baby is born to someone in our family that we love, do we keep this news to ourselves or do we want to tell everyone. This is special; we want to share this news and this feeling of love. Well, shouldn't we want to share the news of the baby Jesus? Do we?

I ask this because Paul in the second reading prays that God will increase our love for the whole human race. He is telling us we must look outwards. We have a duty not just to celebrate Christmas for ourselves but to let others know why we celebrate and show that we respond to our gift of Jesus by showing love to others.

Paul continues, he prays that God will confirm our hearts in holiness. But what is holiness? Holiness touches upon the mystery of God. It transcends our notions of pure and sacred. It is through Jesus that we can be holy. (Let's remember this because just as we are preparing for Christmas during Advent, right now we are preparing ourselves to receive Jesus in communion.

Paul prays for holiness so that we will be blameless in God's sight when Jesus comes. And come again he will.

So what does Luke recall Jesus saying in the Gospel about his second coming? He records that nations will be in agony, men will be dying of fear....and then they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds. We are warned not to be sucked in by the cares of life (it's easy to lose our focus) and Paul tells us to pray for the strength to survive what will happen; to be prepared. So whilst so many are caught up in the frenzy of shopping, we must remember WHY this is all happening.

(We are invited to watch and pray whilst the world sleeps – isn't that what is happening all around us?)

In the equivalent reading in Matthews Gospel about the second coming we are told that immediately after the distress of those days (which Luke mentioned) 'the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.' No-one is going to miss this. Over the past few days as the sun comes up we have seen a beautiful full moon still showing, but the stars vanish. The brightness of the sun obscures them. In like manner, when Jesus comes again, his brightness will blot out everything else – it will be both beautiful and terrifying, everything and everyone will be completely open to his light, no-one will be able to hide; and we are told that we should hold our heads up high for our liberation is at hand. (Dave Wells story re Protestants say “Yes, I am saved”, R.C. say “I hope so”). How are we going to be able to do that?

In *Verbum Dei* Cardinal de Lubac – speaks of a personal faith as a response rather than a submission to authority. Scripture is not a rulebook, it's about coming to understand and know. So, just for a moment come back to the idea of holding a baby. Imagine we are gazing into those gentle eyes, we are filled with love. Now, imagine that baby IS Jesus. I suspect we would be panic stricken on one hand, yet overcome with love on the other. We would surely start to understand and know something about God, and we would respond in love by preparing for this child's future as best we could. So, we are back at the idea of being ready for Jesus' second coming.

So, I hope we all enjoy preparing for Christmas but remember the reason we celebrate is because of Jesus, he came as a baby and let that image spark love in our hearts, and please let's share that love. Our response to this love will lead and increase our personal faith and help us keep alert, help stop us from being overcome by the cares of life. Know that if we follow Jesus, with love, we can stand erect and hold our heads up (now and when he comes again) because it is through Jesus' work that we can be made holy and are saved.

Have a holy Advent.

Rev Jonathan de Kretser