

Today we begin a New Liturgical Year. It is Advent – again!

The point of Advent is in the word itself. It heightens our awareness of something about to happen! It's unsettling! We are invited to reassess where we are and where we are going with our lives, and to see ourselves and as God sees us – insofar as that is possible. Both liturgy and life are pointing us towards the future. Isaiah calls us to confess our sins and hope for better days.

Saint Paul's message in Corinthians is confident and upbeat. Mark warns us against complacency, since the end is coming sooner than we expect. This annual reminder that the world as we know it will one day end, is appropriate at a time when daylight is shorter and darkness seems to be winning over the light. But the positive side of this is that a new day is dawning, when Christ will come again into our lives with power to save us.

Jesus is in Jerusalem, seated on the Mount of Olives, looking toward the Temple and talking confidentially with four disciples: Peter, James, John and Andrew. He sees them worried about when the end of the world will come. He, on the contrary, worries about how his followers will live when he's no longer with them. That's why he tells them yet again: "*Be on your guard, stay awake*". Then he tells them a little parable that we usually hardly notice. "*A man was travelling abroad..*". But before leaving home *«he left his servants in charge, each with his own work to do*". When he says goodbye, he insists on just one thing: "*Stay awake, because you do not know when the master of the house is coming*". See that, when he comes, he doesn't find you asleep.

We are the Master's servants – all of us are waiting, all of us have been left in charge, all of us are needed. We all have some mission entrusted to us by him. We are all called to contribute to the great task of living like Jesus.

The years have passed. Is the spirit of Jesus kept alive in our midst? Do we keep remembering his style of serving those most in need, the ones who can't do it for themselves? Do we keep following him on the path he opened? His great concern is that his Church will fall asleep. That's why he insists three times: "*Stay awake*". It's not just advice for the four disciples

who first heard it, but a command for believers of all times: *“What I am saying to you I say to all: stay awake!”*

Today’s readings actually speak of three comings of Jesus – all of which require us to be Awake & Aware!

The first coming is the one we will celebrate at Christmas, the coming of the Son of God as a human being. Isaiah looks forward to with anticipation. *“Return for the sake of your servants... Oh, that you would tear the heavens open and come down!” cries the prophet.* Isaiah can see how desperately we need our God: *“We had long been rebels against you. We were all like people unclean, all that integrity of ours like filthy clothing. We have all withered like leaves and our sins blew us away like the wind.”*

We need our God to come visibly among us so that he can help us to straighten out our lives, so that we may see more clearly in what direction our lives should go, so that we can restore our relationship with our God and with all his children around us. So, be Awake & be Aware!

But there is another coming we must be deeply aware of. The birth of Jesus in Bethlehem was an event in the past, a historical event. But there is the coming of Jesus each and every day into our lives. Our Creator has been ever present since the first moments of our universe. He comes in every person, in every experience, in every happening. Let us not be so busy looking back at the Christmas event that we fail to be aware of his presence here and now.

St Paul rejoices that Jesus has already come and what it means for our daily lives. *“I never stop thanking God for all the graces you have received through Jesus Christ. I thank him that you have been enriched in so many ways.”* We too can thank God for all that Jesus has brought and continues to bring into our lives, the countless helps he gives us to lead a good life. We do that best by constantly being aware of his presence and action in the people around us. We are helped by so many people, most of whom we do not know, have never seen. It is so easy to take life for granted, but we

really should count our blessings. They are all the sign of Jesus living and active among us, of Jesus coming into my life. Be Awake & Aware!

But Paul goes on, *“The witness to Christ has been strong among you so that you will not be without any of the gifts of the Spirit while you are waiting for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed.”* That brings us to the third coming, when Jesus, at the end of time, will come to take all creation to himself.

We need the help of Jesus now so that we can be fully ready to meet the Jesus when he comes to call us. *“He will keep you steady and without blame until the last day, the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.”*

So the Gospel today reminds us of the need to be ready, to be alert, to be awake, not asleep. We have no idea when the Lord will come to call us. Every day in the papers we read of people being snatched away by accidents, car crashes, sudden illnesses.

Jesus is like a householder who has gone abroad. He has left his servants – that is, you and me – in charge of his affairs, each one with his own task. We each need to ask the questions for ourselves – to heighten our awareness of where God would have us. What is my task, my role in this world? We need to keep in touch with those around us by each day doing our best to live lives of love, of compassion, of forgiveness, of honesty and integrity. We need to keep in touch with our God through lives of prayer. And the simplest and deepest prayer is to be aware of the active presence of God and Jesus permeating every single moment of every single day.

If we live constantly in this way, there will be nothing whatever to fear. We will be ready for the Lord whenever and however he comes and will run forward to meet him as a friend to a friend. Be Awake & Aware!

Advent, in all the readings today, reminds us that our ancestors once called out for a Saviour, and that we in the Church wait for the return of one. We wait, and we hope, knowing nothing other than to keep working, keep watching, and keep awake. Waiting, and hoping, but sadly often missing the point - that we must engage in active waiting and hoping!

Spiritual writers tell us that what we are all searching for, whether we realize it or not, is God. The longed-for thing or person who will ultimately fulfil us, bring us joy, and grant us peace is God. Everything else, even the exquisitely true and good and beautiful things of this life, will leave us unsatisfied at some level. Life is transient, and we continue our search for true fulfilment and flourishing and love.

Advent is the season in the church year when we try to reflect on who or what we are truly searching for. It is a time to meditate and pray about what it is that will fulfil our hearts' desires. The Good News of Advent is that God is also searching for **us**. The story of Advent is not a story of a God waiting to see if we human beings will finally figure it out and find God.

The story of Advent is that God comes to us, and better yet, that God has already found us. We may feel like we are always looking for something or someone, but the Good News of Advent is that God has already come to us, is coming to us, and will keep coming to us. In our searching and seeking, we often fail to see that the gift has already been given, the gift of "God with us," the gift of Emmanuel.

The expectation is that we are God's hands, God's light on this earth. God calls us to shine a light, to be witnesses to his mercy and love; not only through our words, but also in our works. We are called to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and visit the prisoner. When we serve those in need, we are witnesses to the Lord's coming – symbolically on Christmas Day, and for real today and all the tomorrows of our lives.