

Sunday Homily

1ST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

28 NOVEMBER 2021

YEAR C

DIVINE OFFICE WEEK 1

“And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.”

Illustration

Today's scripture readings seem to come from another world. Jeremiah looks forward to honesty and integrity in the land. Paul expects us to live a completely blameless life. And Jesus speaks of a day when “the powers of heaven will be shaken”. Jeremiah and Paul, and even Jesus himself, may appear so much concerned with another world that they seem irrelevant to the world in which we actually live today.

Nothing could be further from the truth! Their world was as disordered as ours. Jeremiah preached as the Babylonian armies began their destruction of Jerusalem. Paul wrote when the first Christians were beginning to despair under the pressure of persecution. And Jesus' words are his last before his passion. Their message was for a world like ours.

But how, in the midst of such chaos and suffering, could the visions of today's readings be recognised as real and relevant? The answer is illustrated in the lesson given in a simple way by an elderly lady in a nursing home. She had been paralysed for years but had retained the use of her hands. With these hands she produced the most beautiful embroidery one could ever wish to see. One day she showed a visitor her latest creation, a beautiful pattern of flowers and birds. “This”, she said, “is the way God sees our world: a thing of beauty, ordered and harmonious.”

Then, reversing the material, she showed the other side: the little tufts and loose ends, the irregular patterns. “And this”, she added, “is the world we see: disordered, problems unresolved, questions unanswered. But it will not always be like this. Next time you come I will have tidied up that side too and it will be as good as the other. This is what God will do at the end of time. God will tidy up what human beings have disturbed, and put right what has gone wrong.”

Gospel Teaching

Jesus Christ taught us to look at the world through his own eyes – the eyes of God. When we look at the world using our own eyes we can be filled with confusion. But using Christ's vision we recognise something ordered and beautiful. We see a purpose in life; we are given true insight. The necessary “tidying up” comes, of course, at the end of time when the Son of Man appears “with power and great glory”, but the picture can already be recognised.

The season of Advent prepares us to look at the world through Christ's eyes: it prepares us for his coming into our life in a richer and more realistic way. Sometimes we think that we prepare by ignoring the world we live in; or we imagine that the difficulties of this life are somehow an obstacle between ourselves and God. But Christ makes it plain that we prepare for his coming precisely by taking a searching look at *this* world and perceiving, through the disorder, the guiding hand of God. With Christ's insight we can enjoy the vision of Jeremiah and Paul: we can recognise that God is truly with us.

Application

How can we absorb that assurance of God's presence enjoyed by Jeremiah and Paul? How can we learn to look at the world through Christ's eyes? These are tasks for life. But Advent is a time set aside to stop and reflect in a special way on how Christ comes into our life.

First, Advent directs us to the birth of Christ in Bethlehem. Our faith is not founded on feelings or emotions. It is founded on one clear fact: that in the birth of Jesus Christ, God came into the world as a human being.

Second, Advent directs our attention to Christ's coming in our everyday life. He comes when we least expect him: in the awkward person we have to deal with; when we are feeling unwell and are tired with the difficulties of life. Our daily prayer helps us to prepare for those moments.

Finally, Advent directs us to Christ's coming for the last time – the "day [that] will be sprung on you suddenly, like a trap". If we have contemplated his coming at Christmas and in our daily life, this final coming will be no fearful scanning of the horizon, hoping we will not be caught unawares. On the contrary, it will be a welcoming of a God who has been as close to us as he is in our celebration of the Eucharist: a God with whom we have been in such close communion that we have learned to see the world through his eyes.