

Advent 2

"You know the time has come: you must wake up now: our salvation is even nearer than it was when we were converted. The night is almost over, it will be daylight soon – let us give up all the things we prefer to do under cover of the dark; let us arm ourselves and appear in the light". (Romans 13:11-12)

On the first Sunday of Advent a cry goes out to the people of God - not a gentle, coaxing appeal but a loud and dramatic exhortation. Wake up! The time has come! This is a time when the secret thoughts of our hearts will be revealed. It is a time of judgement or – more specifically – of testing when, if we are aware to the work of the Holy Spirit within us, we shall be ready for the final glorious coming of God when his kingdom will finally be established.

St Paul has taken up this theme that recurs in the Bible, that of being 'awake'. The awakened heart is the heart of one who is spiritually alert to the continuing presence of God: 'I hear my Beloved knocking' (Song of Songs 5:2). It's the heart that listens to the still small voice of the Holy Spirit within and responds.

In both the Old and New Testaments this vigilant faith is illustrated by what the Bible calls 'the watch'. The watchman foregoes his sleep to keep guard and prevent enemies invading under the cover of darkness. It is from simple images like this in the bible that we can draw out so much helpful teaching: if we are not watchful we can be lulled into a kind of spiritual complacency – which presents the ideal conditions for the very subtle assault of the enemy. He will be delighted to entice us into a settled, cosy routine of worship, prayer and good works so that we become too preoccupied to be attentive to the fresh challenges that God relentlessly calls us to.

Someone who strives to be spiritually awake is not only watching for the enemy, he is watching also for God, looking out for him, listening for his voice. 'I hear my beloved. See how he comes....My Beloved lifts up his voice, he says to me, "Come" (Song of Songs 2:8,10). And Jesus himself echoes the idea when he exhorts his disciples to 'stay awake and continually 'watch and pray (Mt 24-26)

Today we begin to anticipate the joyful experience of the birth of Jesus. But in order to prepare for it we must pray for a new birth within ourselves, pray that God will do something new in our lives and awaken us from our complacent sleep. We live in a secular world shrouded in the darkness of unbelief, but we have accepted the Light that enlightens all men (Johnn:1-9).and we must allow it to penetrate our darkness, to heal and restore us so that we in turn can become a light in our world. When someone has a deep prayer life and is learning to move into more profound belief, repentance and more radical commitment, the grace of God in their lives can flow out very powerfully to others.

QUESTIONS

1. *Advent is the Season of Hope and consolation. In our society what things are we as a Church less than confident about today? What are the signs of hope which bring us reassurance and comfort? Discuss*

2. *'Prepare ye the way of the Lord and make his paths straight, every valley will be filled and every mountain laid low'. What do you think John the Baptist meant by these words taken from the Old Testament? Do these words have any relevance for the modern man and woman? Discuss.*

3. *How can we as a parish raise people's awareness of Advent as a time of spiritual awakening for ourselves, our families and indeed society as a whole? Discuss*

4. *Could the new evangelization, spoken about a lot by Pope Francis, be seen in the context of a new awakening within the church to the voice of God coming through the Scriptures? Discuss*