

Advent 1

It was about 11.30pm on Christmas Eve 1978: I had arrived at my local church to celebrate the first Mass of Christmas at midnight as usual. But as I sat there I simply had to face up to the fact that my tired, aching body was in no fit state to celebrate anything. (Delia Smith)

How incongruous that in order to celebrate the second greatest feast in the Christian calendar had become so ensnared in the trap of what the world makes of Christmas that I was miserable – not joyful. I had done my worldly best wrapping presents, posting cards, preparing food: not a thing missed. But at that moment of self-revelation I realised I was simply too exhausted to celebrate this, the greatest birth in the history of mankind.

Looking at how our modern, secular Christmas has evolved, I am reminded of a very telling passage of scripture in the Book of Exodus. When Moses came to the Hebrew slaves to tell them the good news that God was about to set them free, Pharaoh's reaction was to increase their workload. "Make them work harder", he said, 'so they have no time to listen' (5:9). There we have it! Only this time it's not Moses come to lead the people of God from one end of the Middle East to the other, but God himself come into this world in the person of Jesus, come to each one of us to set us free from our slavery to sin and finally through his resurrection from death itself. How significant it is that at Christmas time we find ourselves so easily caught up in twice our normal workload, so that we too have no time to listen to the Christmas message of freedom.

The fruitful use of the Advent Season will help us discover the emptiness that lies beneath the world's pressures and business, and how in the end all our frantic activity only serves to numb our aching need for God Himself. It's only when we learn to be still and listen that we begin to find him, and when we begin to find Him we begin to understand that union with him, which is the purpose of our creation. As the psalmist said so simply and wisely: 'In God alone is my soul at rest' (Ps 62: v 1).

Advent means 'coming' and God is coming. As we prepare to celebrate his human birth, we also prepare for his coming to us in each of our lives at a deeper level. Wherever we have reached our walk with God, we constantly need to deepen that relationship and ask him to come closer. But though we are individuals, we are also part of a whole Church, the mystical body of Christ, which prays continuously and collectively for his final glorious coming. So as each of us prepares for Advent in our own ways, let us together join in that one great prayer for the world: 'Lord, may your Kingdom come on Earth as it is in Heaven'. Amen'.

Questions

- 1. Is the spirit of Advent lost because of the shopping frenzy which is part of the lead-up to Christmas for most people? Discuss*
- 2. Advent means 'the coming of Christ'. What are the ways in which Christ comes to us? What might prevent us from experiencing his presence in our lives? Discuss*

3. *'Wake up' is the Advent summons to us all. What issues do we as Catholic Christians need to 'wake up' to in our times? Discuss*