

ADVENT 1A

I was in 'Cosco' about three weeks ago and believe it or not, they already had Christmas songs playing in the store. The soothing music was meant to entice me to spend money at my leisure, long before the Christmas rush, on items I possibly could ill afford. The Advent logo for big wholesale giants might run as follows 'how many shopping days till Christmas'. But what about us?

The Birth of Christ in a poverty stricken cave at Bethlehem is forgotten for a large swathe of people and in its place consumerism takes over which can act like an addiction. Christmas can be used as an excuse for indulging my ego and not a lot to do with how I need to change to become a more loving person. Advent is a glorious time to make this reassessment.

Without it the celebration of Christ's birth will be hollow and lack any real depth. So it's not for nothing the one of the more poignant themes of Advent is to 'wake up'.

Firstly we need to be awakened from spiritual slumber in order to recognise what the real meaning of Christmas is all about as distinct from the 'eat drink and make merry' substitute foisted upon us by relentless advertisements in the run up to the feast.

God became man at Christmas because He loves us and wants to save us from sin and selfishness and all that would harm us. He left all His glory behind and taught us by word and example what we must do to share forever in His glory. If that message sinks in then we will have taken on board the true happiness of Christmas. The Christmas nuance is joy not a pleasure trip in mid-winter.

God became man on the first Christmas 2000 years ago. After leaving all his glory behind and his royal throne, he came into this world as a helpless little baby and in more or less abject circumstances. As the Pope said last year "Christ was born in

a stable in order to humble human pride”.

It is pride which prevents me from ‘waking up’. If the centre of my life is myself then the true message of Christmas will pass over my head. 'Conversion requires changing my attitude', Pope Francis said recently. Like Zacchaeus I have to be willing to change long held views on things which are not Christian or downright unchristian. That can be a real tonic for some. Pope Francis goes on “Conversion leads to humbly recognizing my mistakes, my infidelities and evasions”.

If I do that, I will indeed be preparing myself to celebrate the feast in a worthy manner and experience the joy of Christ at a deeper level which will affect the members of my family and indeed those I normally associate with in the wider community. Christ will be reborn in my life if I use Advent to reassess my relationship with Christ and what might be forestalling me from greater union with Him. The Holy Father again puts it concisely when he says: “let us open the doors of our hearts wide for Christ this Advent”. In this way this sacred season will have borne us fruit.