

Advent 1C

In the market place of the old German town of Trier, two churches stand adjacent to each other. "Watch and pray" is written under the belfry of one and beneath the belfry of the other the scripture verse in completed, "for you know neither the day nor the hour". As the clock chimes out on the hour, the people in the busy street below are being constantly reminded that their relatively short time in this world is to be used wisely in preparation for the world to come.

Today, on the first Sunday of Advent a call goes out to the whole Church - not a gentle coaxing appeal but a loud, dramatic exhortation. It is a wake up call to watch and pray for we don't know the hour when the Lord will come knocking on our door. Hence the need for vigilance.

What does it say in the Gospel today? "Watch yourselves, or your hearts will be coarsened with debauchery, drunkenness and cares of life"

Looking up the Oxford dictionary, I discovered that the word 'coarsened' means ***'not delicate in perception'***. Our heart may not be coarsened by debauchery or drunkenness, *but what about the cares and worries of life*. Trivial concerns could be getting us down, things we should be handing over to the Lord for healing and help. The Lord says 'come to me all you who labour and are burdened and I will give you rest'. And again: 'my peace I give to you, do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid'. If we believed in these words, nothing would get us down. But the problem is we only half believe. So could the cares of life have blurred my perception of things spiritual and made me less than vigilant. The answer, according to today's Gospel, is a resounding 'yes'.

So in order to become more spiritually perceptive, *I need to step back at times from life's treadmill and be still - not just to*

slow down my body but also and especially my mind. That is not easy especially in the run-up to Christmas. If we're motivated enough, we can and will find time to be alone with God each day this Advent. How significant it is that at Christmas we find ourselves so easily caught up in twice our normal workload, so that we have no time to listen to Christ's saving message. It's only when we learn to be still and listen that we begin to find him, and understand that union with Him is the very purpose of our existence. As the Bible says: 'in God alone is my soul at rest'

We could easily absolve ourselves in thinking that all this extended activity before Christmas is for the sake of the family and that without us nothing would get done. The cynic might add that *'the graveyard is full of indispensable people'*.

During Advent we open our hearts to God in preparation for the greatest birthday in the history of mankind. In sharing our human nature and redeeming it, God offers us an endless share in His own divine life. Like Mary let's ponder these things in our heart.