

3 December 2017 (1st Sunday in Advent, Year B)

Isaiah 63:16-17,64:1,3-8; Psalm 79(80):2-3,15-16,18-19; 1 Corinthians 1:3-9; Mark 13:33-37.

Stay awake!

Happy New Year! Today, as we celebrate the first Sunday of Advent, we also start a new Church Liturgical year. The Church year is meant to represent our own life in miniature and just as our life starts at birth, so also with the Church; its new year starts with the birth of a child!

Every new beginning, every birth, is preceded by a time of preparation and expectation. There are lots to think about and prepare for before one can accept a new child into this world. For the Church, the new child that is going to be born for us, and for whom we need to make space, is God himself, Jesus, Emmanuel – God with us.

As I look back I realise that I have lived through many Advent seasons. I am aware that in my younger years Advent was for me more of a time to think about the gifts I would be receiving, and about the beautiful Christmas decorations. As I grew older hopefully I started focusing more on the real meaning of Christmas; the birth of the young child who is God among us.

Advent is a time of waiting; what do I wait for? How do I wait? I no longer wait for the 25th of December. I know that Jesus Christ the Son of God was born once in Bethlehem more than two thousand years ago. The Christmas celebration is only the celebration of Jesus' birthday, the celebration of an anniversary. I do, however, try to prepare myself to the best of my abilities for the many times Jesus is born again in my daily life and, more importantly, for the moment when I get to meet God face to face. I believe that these two events are very closely related.

In today's gospel Jesus narrates a short parable speaking about a householder who goes overseas and before he goes he gives each of his servants – us – a task to carry out. He obviously expects those tasks to be finished when he returns. I have a choice how to do this: I can either set myself down and finish the job as soon as I can, or I can sit on my job and drag it out taking my time to complete it. In the latter case I may be risking that the master returns before I would have finished the task I was assigned. Jesus encourages us to stay awake and not let ourselves be distracted by things that happen around us.

Stay awake does not imply never going to sleep physically; it refers to an attitude of alertness and preparedness. As a further example Jesus mentions the door keeper whose role is to be constantly prepared to open the door and let the master in as soon as he arrives back.

Where is Jesus born in my life today? How do I prepare and wait for him? I can prepare by constantly being aware of God's presence in my life. At times I may be too busy running by daily errands and forget to acknowledge God in my life. Prayer, small moments where I re-connect with God, is a very important way of keeping me focused. Between close friends, a long telephone conversation is often not necessary, a brief text message does the job perfectly well; it simply says 'I am here standing beside you!' My prayer life too can have the long phone conversations and many short text messages reminding me that God is with me at every stage of my life, indeed God is as close to me as the breath that I breathe every moment of my life.

When I learn to see God in my life, then I can more readily see God in my family and friends, in those around me, in those less fortunate. This way I prepare myself for the day I get to meet God face to face.

My whole life is a time of Advent, preparing for the coming of God in my life.

Fr Mario