

1st December 2019 (First Sunday in Advent, Year A)

Isaiah 2:1-5; Psalm 121(122):1-2,4-5,6-9; Romans 13:11-14; Matthew 24:37-44.

'Stay awake! Stand ready!'

It is not easy to stay alert all the time when one is busy or doing repetitive work. We tend to go on *'autopilot,'* and sleep standing up! It is not the first time that we ask ourselves: 'have I done such-and-such a thing?' Have I locked the door behind me? Have I switched off all the lights? And many other things we do without even thinking.

In today's gospel Jesus warns his listeners against this type of behaviour. Once we get used to the routine it is very easy to miss the details and we may not notice when things have changed around us. Jesus uses the story of Noah, in the book of Genesis (6-9), as a parable. Noah was asked by God to build a big boat to prepare for the flood that was coming. People would certainly have seen this ark happening, but they were too occupied with their daily chores to ask what was the need for this boat, or at least what was the meaning behind this symbol. There is no indication that Noah's contemporaries were doing anything especially wrong, they simply kept living their daily lives and missed this important sign. Some may have seen the sign and chose to ignore it, others could have seen the sign and decided to postpone their response to it. All this did to their great detriment; all were taken over by the flood.

Jesus warns his disciples that the Son of Man will come; he has in fact already come and is among us, and we may miss his coming. The image of the *'Son of Man'* refers to a vision in the book of the prophet Daniel (7:13) in the Old Testament. The prophet sees *'one like a son of man'* – a normal human being – coming in glory at the end of times. In the gospels Jesus applies this image to himself. Indeed, the Son of Man has already come, born in Bethlehem, hidden within human nature and culture, and many simply kept going on with their daily busyness and ignored his message.

The Son of Man comes and lives among us every day, the annual celebration of Advent and Christmas is simply another warning sign, inviting us to wake up to observe the Son of Man in our midst, walking our streets. It is very important to celebrate Christmas; it is equally important not to let the Christmas celebrations, gifts and dinners, become yet another distraction stopping us from seeing the Christ who comes.

The Son of Man comes like a burglar in the middle of the night, not to take us by surprise, but because he wants to participate deeply in our life. God has engaged in the project of the incarnation so perfectly, that it has often become very difficult to see the signs of his coming. Hence the need to be always alert and awake, like the good detective who suspects and checks even the smallest and most insignificant details, and often it is those details that lead him to solve the case.

Where do I see the Christ today in my daily life? He is my wife, my husband, my children, my parents, my neighbour, who require me to spend some time with them listening to their stories and ministering to them. He is the poor, the homeless, the illegal immigrant, the refugee, those who disrupt my comfortable way of life. *'The poor save us,'* tells us Pope Francis, *'they are the easiest way to meet Christ!'*

How do I stay alert this Christmas? How do I continue listening to God who comes and lives my life every day?

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