

1st Sunday of Advent 2021

When we look around our world today there are many people who are seriously hoping for a change of fortune in their lives. The constant stream of migrants crossing from France to England despite the tragedy of this last week with at least 27 people losing their lives. People in different countries hoping, yearning for the implementation of policies which will slow the advance of climate change. People throughout the world hooping and yearning that the current pandemic will come to an end.

In our first reading today Jeremiah speaks words of hope to a people hopelessly divided among themselves and many exiled from their own land. 'The days are coming, it is the Lord who speaks, when I am going to fulfil the promise I made to the House of Israel and the House of Judah,' And the promise, very simply, is a saviour, though the word is not used, rather he speaks of 'virtuous branch grown for David who shall practice honesty and integrity in the land.'

When we come to the Gospel passage for today the first half of it speaks in apocalyptic terms which at first sight instil fear rather than hope, signs in the sun, moon and stars, nations in agony, people dying of fear, the very heavens being shaken, but then the hope, The Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. This reminds us that Advent prepares us not only for the birth of Christ, but the second coming of Christ at the end of time, a time we simply do not know, indeed, Jesus said in another place that the end of time is known to the Father only. Are we to be fearful of this second coming, well not according to Jesus in today's passage – 'When these things begin to take place, stand erect, hold your heads high, because your liberation is near at hand.'

We live in the so called 'in-between time', namely after the birth of Christ and before his return at the end of time and we are encouraged to do two things which are not always easy to hold together, to be realistic about what is happening in the world and at the same time not to lose hope, and a good way of not losing hope is to reflect on Jesus' own life and ministry. He came to liberate the world from evil and sin, from the darkness of selfishness and the pursuit of the trivial. He came to liberate people from the paralysing effects of fear, from the tyranny of anger and the choking of guilt. If we try to do the same then liberation continues. As we know his life was not without frustration, opposition, rejection and to many his life ended in defeat, with his death on the cross of a criminal. But we believe that the Father raised him from the dead and in the light of Easter we see his death not as failure but as victory over sin and death.

Jesus final words in today's gospel put before us a way of being during this Advent season – 'Stay awake, praying at all times for the strength to survive all that is going to happen, and to stand with confidence before the Son of Man.'

Bidding Prayers for the 1st Sunday of Advent (Luke)

Celebrant:

To you O Lord I lift up my soul. Inspired by these words of the psalmist we raise our minds and hearts in prayer.

Reader:

For the Church – that at the beginning of this Season of Advent the Church will help us to begin again and renew our commitment to follow the Lord with our eyes open and on guard against those things which distract us.

Lord in your mercy

For political leaders – that they will renew their efforts to root out injustice, oppression and violence so that all people may live in peace.

Lord in your mercy

For this parish community and for our families and friends – that we will hear the words of the Gospel and be awake praying at all times for the strength to survive all that is going to happen.

Lord in your mercy

For all those suffering in body, mind or spirit – that they, and those who care for them will receive the love and support they need. Lord in your mercy

For those who have died, all victims of violence, accident, natural disaster and the Covid 1p pandemic, for Fr Barrie Holmes a retired priest of the diocese who died earlier this week and Catherine Kennedy, Fred Greenwood and Arthur Sanderson whose anniversaries occur this week – that they and all who have died may rest in peace and rise in glory. Lord in your mercy

Either aloud or in silence we pray for our own special intentions...pause...then

Lord in your mercy

We ask the prayers of Mary as we say, Hail Mary...

Celebrant:

Father, as clay in your hands and the work of your hands, mould us into the likeness of your Son who calls us to be both vigilant and prayerful. We ask you this through Christ our Lord. Amen