

## 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of Advent 2020 (Mark)

Waiting is a fact of life whether it is for something fairly trivial like the kettle to boil, the bus to arrive, or something much more important, the birth of a child, the final breaths of someone we love. In our first reading God's people had been waiting to return to Jerusalem after the exile and when the time came they found it in ruins, the Temple destroyed, and we think of our friends in Nicaragua rebuilding their homes after the hurricanes. Isaiah has the people pleading for God to 'tear the heavens open and come down' to intervene on their behalf. And on this World Day of Solidarity with the People of Palestine we pray for a transformation in their relations with their neighbours so that all can live in peace rather than fear, violence and deprivation.

There is also waiting in the gospel passage in which Jesus tells the story of the master leaving his servants in charge while he goes away. They are to be 'on their guard', to 'stay awake' because they do not know when the master will return. This parable is about the end time and our readiness for it. This first Sunday of Advent reminds us that we are living in the 'in between time', namely after the birth of Christ and before his return at the end of time and the invitation at the beginning of this new liturgical year is to ask how are we living?

One word which comes up twice in the first reading from Isaiah is 'integrity' which literally means 'whole' or 'complete'. If we do a word search on integrity we find honesty, truthfulness, honour, trustworthiness, morality and many more. Isaiah reminds us that it is God who guides those who act with integrity and so it is for our own wellbeing to invite God into our lives through prayer, being aware and mindful of God's presence in ourselves, in others, indeed in the whole of creation. It is when we lose sight of God that we can also walk away from integrity, blown around like fallen leaves, a real autumnal image of drifting without any purpose.

Three times in the gospel Jesus tells the disciples to 'stay awake' and the word Advent, which literally means coming, tells us for what, and for whom, we are to stay awake, namely the coming of Christ, but not just at the end of time. In last Sunday's gospel of the parable of the sheep and the goats, Christ identified with all those in need, so if we are staying awake for Christ's coming/presence then we are committing ourselves to being more aware of the many human needs all around us, hunger, poverty, homelessness, illness, injustice, wrongful imprisonment, prejudice, violence, the list could go on.

Finally in the short parable in today's gospel there is a promise, that Christ will come. In these times of pandemic, of political and economic uncertainty, we need to hold on to that promise, because left to ourselves we could easily give up. Trusting in that promise helps us to remain hope filled and faithful. Meantime we wait, each of us as the gospel says, with our own task to do, not simply on our own, but connected to each other. And we try to fulfil those tasks as, in the words of the prayer after the Our Father in Mass, 'we await the blessed hope and the coming of our Saviour Jesus Christ.'

## Bidding Prayers for the 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of Advent (Mark)

Celebrant:

God of hosts, turn again we implore, look down from heaven and see. With these words of the psalmist in our hearts we turn to God 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 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. We remember especially on this day of solidarity the people of Palestine.

Lord in your mercy

For those in hospital, awaiting or undergoing surgery, for those in care homes and for those recuperating – that they will know the presence of the Lord and the love of those around them.

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 and alert to the presence of Christ among us especially in those in greatest need.

Lord in your mercy

For those who have died, all victims of violence, accident, natural disaster and the Covid pandemic, and Catherine Kennedy, Fred Greenwood, Arthur Sanderson and Michael McKeever 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, we are clay in your hands and the work of your hands, mould us into the likeness of your Son on whom we model our lives. This prayer we make through Christ our Lord. Amen