

First Sunday of Advent – Year A

The readings of Advent naturally focus on the theme of the Lord's coming to bring awareness of the reign or kingdom of God. The Scripture readings urge us to follow the teachings of Christ so that we are ready to welcome the coming of the Lord into our lives.

Isaiah 2:1-5 The first reading from Isaiah is an account of a vision experienced by the prophet. The title of the section indicates that the vision concerns the southern kingdom of Judah. Isaiah sees a time in the future when all nations will come to recognise the Hebrew God and will pay homage to God in the new and transformed Jerusalem.

The prophet is really seeing the messianic age in which God's values of compassion, goodness and love will govern human behaviour. This is, in effect, the age of the reign of God where justice and peace would rule.

There is something quite adolescent about the strike and payback syndrome.

When the messiah comes to bring in the reign of God with its environment of peace and understanding then the weapons of war will be melted down to manufacture the tools of livelihood. It is interesting to note how aggression and war seem to be the outcomes of immaturity in the human psyche. There is something quite adolescent about the strike and payback syndrome that has blighted human society since the very beginning.

The Nazis, in imitation of so many cultures before them, made a virtue of war and praised the qualities of the warrior whose ultimate aim was to crush another set of human beings that were different or unacceptable, for whatever reason. Today we see the same adolescent solutions being sought in an effort to resolve conflict. One wonders if a great nation like the USA is unwittingly affected by its own Hollywood culture where the perceived bad guy always gets eliminated by the good guy. How many films have we all seen where the only solution for the villain is to have him killed by the hero? How many films have we seen where the bad guy has a flash of insight and a change of heart, and then reforms to a life of goodness? Yeah, right! That would not bring in box office dollars.

It seems that as a species we still have a lot of growing up to do.

This insidious culture then spreads to an attitude that says: my problem will be solved if I eliminate my enemy. It would be a more mature, not to say Christlike procedure to work at reconciliation and the dismantling of those narrow-minded attitudes that cause differences and inequalities to ferment into conflict. It seems that as a species we still have a lot of growing up to do and Isaiah implies that when we do, the reign of God will have a good chance of being fulfilled. Peace will replace conflict and war, and we will 'walk in the light of the Lord.'

Psalms 122 This is a prayer for peace – peace on Jerusalem in particular and peace on the whole world in general. The poet's message is: the city that is sacred to the Lord, the city in which the Temple was a symbolic reminder of the presence of God among the people, should be a city of peace. After all, God is not a God of war but a God of peace.

Romans 13:11-14 This is Paul's call to live in the full light of the approaching day. Rescue is near. Salvation in both Testaments is a process of restoration and rescue. In the Hebrew Scriptures salvation was understood as God delivering people from danger, oppression or wrongdoing.

Psalm 130:8 is an example: It is he who will redeem Israel
from all its iniquities.

The theology here is based on the covenant relationship Israel had with God. In this context God keeps promises, God continually provides enduring love (*hesed*) and God always acts as Israel's king and redeemer/saviour. For us, then, salvation is not so much an end-time reality as a process that builds up over a lifetime and establishes a relationship with the One who is.

The face we show to others should be the face of Jesus Christ.

Paul is urging the Roman community to put off all works of darkness, that is, behaviour that does not gel with the values of Jesus, and live honourably with works of light. In other words, when people see the Christian they should be reminded of Jesus himself. Our behaviour should reflect the fact that we

are disciples of Jesus, and our lives should radiate the light of goodness. The face we show to others should be the face of Jesus Christ.

There is a sense of urgency in Paul's exhortation because he was convinced that the second coming of Christ was near at hand. The time of salvation was just around the corner, so it was important that people prepare themselves. This echoes the language of Jesus himself who was insistent that the disciple should always be ready to meet God and should live the kind of life that reflects this readiness.

The unreflected life is not worth living

Matthew 24:37-44 The gospel reading from Matthew also stresses the need for vigilance. As Jesus says, we do not know the day or the hour of our reckoning. He refers to the Genesis story of the flood that occurred because human beings had become so evil that punishment was inevitable. The point Jesus makes is that people were so busy pursuing their own lives of self-indulgence and the satisfaction of their egos that they did not take time out to reflect on their behaviour and their goals. The philosopher Socrates said that the unreflected life is not worth living, and the pursuit of short-term gratification does not make for growth and depth in the development of the self.

We see something of this in modern society where so many people seem to be living on automatic pilot, going through a series of routines and then wondering what they have really achieved. Dissatisfaction is inevitable if we don't have goals to strive for and clarity about what we want and what values we adopt to achieve our goals. An endless spiral of unmindful routine can easily wind up in depression, which, along with anxiety, is one of our current world's most prevalent sicknesses.

Jesus uses the analogy of the householder who would surely protect his house and belongings if he knew he was about to be burgled. But if he was drifting and was unaware that he was about to be burgled and so dropped his guard then he would be rendering himself and his house vulnerable. It is the fool who drifts aimlessly through life, and it is equally the fool who lives only to satisfy material desires and ego. The implication of Jesus' analogy here is that a life of mindfulness and clarity will keep us spiritually awake and focused on sound goals so that we will always be prepared to face our God.

Inner peace begins the moment you choose not to allow a person, an event, or an external circumstance to control your emotions.

Pema Chödrön American-born Tibetan Buddhist nun, author spiritual teacher.

Schoolboy Howlers

A watershed is where water is kept

Noah's wife was Joan of Arc

A synagogue is like a church. A place where sinners worship.

Sodom and Gomorrah are two famous volcanoes in Europe

New York stands on the Atlantic sideboard.

Mushrooms always grow in damp places and so they look like umbrellas.

The Last Post is always sounded by the burglars of our School Spitoon.

A glazier is a man who runs down mountains.

Laurie Woods