

## 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday in Advent 2020

While we are currently emerging from the drama of an American presidential election, sixty years ago, the media were abuzz with the news of the election of John F Kennedy as US President. Three years later, on 22<sup>nd</sup> November 1963, Kennedy was assassinated and to this day people still discuss what his legacy might have been, had he served out his presidency. After his death, a note, in Kennedy's own handwriting, was found among his papers. It read, "I know there is a God – and I see a storm coming. If he has a place for me, I believe that I am ready." When he wrote this, he had no idea of the suddenness and violence of the storm that would break over him on that fateful day in Dallas.

John Kennedy's words, "I believe I am ready", echo those of Jesus in this Sunday's Gospel passage: "*Be on your guard, stay awake, because you will never know when the time will come*"? I wonder if it has ever crossed your mind that the Church takes literally the advice of Jesus to "*stay awake*"? Just as the sun sets on one land and rises on another, as prayer ends in one place, it begins in another; as one Mass ends here, somewhere else another begins. While we sleep, others are "*awake, keeping watch, and praying.*" Around the world the Church watches and waits for her Lord.

Of course, we are all called to be "watch-keepers"! Advent, which begins today, comes as a great wake-up call, reminding us, we who have very busy lives, to "Watch! Be alert! Be vigilant!" What then are we to be alert too?" Life, today, can be very pressured, consumed by the urgent, causing priorities to be overlooked! Advent, in the face of the so called "Christmas rush", challenges us to be alert to the real priorities of life. And it is one of those priorities that Jesus points out to us through today's Gospel passage: "*you do not know when the master of the house is coming...*" St. Augustine claimed that it was by design that Jesus hid our last day from us so that we would be on the lookout for him every day of our lives.

It seems, that often it is only when the fragility of life is laid bare that we manage to get our priorities in order. It is only when some crisis, or trauma, pulls us up short, that we realise how vulnerable we are, how fragile life is. St. Augustine advised that we should live each day as if it is our last. That, in fact, is a summary of today's Gospel. Advent seeks to alert us to the importance of having the right priorities. As we begin the season of Advent here are three thoughts drawn from the readings of today's Mass.

In the reading from the prophet Isaiah we hear the words, "*Our sins blew us away like the wind.*" How easy it is to be blown off course, to stray from the ways of integrity! Advent is the season for a review of life, and many at this time would wish to come to Confession. But this year, because of Covid-19, this may not be possible. What are we to do? Let us heed what Pope Francis has advised! In our present difficult situation, when it is not possible to come to the Church, speak to God from your heart; acknowledge truthfully what you have done, or failed to do, and with all your heart ask forgiveness with a sincere Act of Sorrow. Later, when the situation is more normal, we can avail of Confession and celebrate God's forgiveness, which is so freely given.

The second thought is also taken from the prophet Isaiah. Addressing God, Isaiah says, "*Lord, you are our Father; we the clay, you the potter, we are the work of your hand.*" These last months, and the thought of the winter months that lie ahead, have filled us with apprehension. Yes, it is true, the news of the vaccine is a sign of hope, and yet, we are uncertain about the future. The prophet reminds us, "*Lord, you are our Father*". Let us entrust ourselves and our families into the keeping of God, in the same spirit as that of Jesus, who prayed in the midst of his difficulties. "*Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.*"

St Paul, in the second reading, says to us, "*the witness to Christ has indeed been strong among you.*" We give thanks for our faith in Christ, and as we strive to witness to that faith, we keep in mind two things: fidelity to prayer and love of neighbour. No life is so busy that there is no time for prayer! It may be short, but let it be sincere! Remember,

that among most significant words in life are these, “I love you”; a short sentence, but it says everything! Prayer ought to be the same. But love needs to express itself, to give witness to its sincerity. We can witness to our faith this Advent and Christmastime by our practical concern for the homeless and the hungry in our society.

*“Lord Jesus, you tell us to stay awake and pray  
because we know neither the day nor the hour.  
May each day find us more ready to welcome you into our lives,  
and may the last of our days be the happiest,  
when we will see you, face-to-face.” Amen.*