

FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT (A)

- Isaiah 2: 1-5
- Psalm 122
- Romans 13: 11-14
- Matthew 24: 37-44

We can all remember being told to “wake up” when we were growing up. I know that when I was a teenager it came from my mother most often on a Saturday morning when I wanted to sleep in and she decided otherwise and had a list of chores that needed to be done. And of course the “wake up” call could come from a teacher who seemed to always know when we didn’t have an answer to his/her question or even more probably when we were day dreaming and had no idea what the teacher had asked. There are times in all of our lives when waking up or remaining attentive is challenging.

As we begin this new liturgical year on this First Sunday of Advent the scriptures that the Church offers for our reflection invite us to wake up; to be awake to something wonderful, to good news! In the first reading from the prophet Isaiah, we hear of God’s dream and plan for humanity. It is a vision and promise of hope; it is a vision of a new place for the presence of the Holy and one God. This new place is the holy mountain which will rise above all others and to which all the nations will come to learn of the ways of the Lord. The new presence of the Lord will bring a new light into the world and by this light there will be no need for preparing for war – so the nations *“shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks; one nation shall not raise the sword against another.”* If all the nations continue walking up the mountain toward the light then they will walk together and live together within the light. The message is clear and at the same time a challenge because it is an invitation for enemies to learn how to become friends and for nations to turn weapons of destruction into tools that can be used for gardening and farming and thus become a means to build up God’s creation, including humanity, rather than destroy it. God through Isaiah and the Church today through the season of Advent invite us to walk in this light, to give ourselves over to this vision.

How do we do this? In today's reading from St. Paul's letter to the believers in Rome we get a clue. He speaks of "waking up" from our sleep because our salvation is nearer now than when we first became believers. We are to work at laying aside everything that speaks darkness in us and instead come into the power of the light of Jesus Christ. Now is the time to "wake up" to another opportunity to change our lives, to turn from selfishness and sin. To let go of all that can give rise to violence, mistrust, anger, prejudice, injustice, fear, dehumanizing sensuality in us or anything that keeps us from being fully alive in Christ and fully awake to the presence of God in others.

Today's Gospel may remind us that our hold on this life is limited, that each one of us will die, that our personal world will end and indeed the world itself as we know it will end but we are not to be caught up in fear or trembling about this, rather we are invited to the hope that is born of opening our hearts and minds more fully to God and to living for God in every action of our lives.

The words of Isaiah and Paul remind us that the best way to prepare for the reality of the inevitable end of life but also to prepare to remember God's coming among us in Jesus at Christmas is through the conversion of our hearts.

The readings today ask us: what keeps you, what keeps me from furthering God's dream as presented by Isaiah? How does the darkness, spoken of by Paul, manifest itself in me? What name or face do we give it? What is the darkness in us that needs to be put aside and replaced with the armor of light?

In the Advent time weeks ahead, the Scriptures call us to be open to the possibility of entering into the same longing and sense of hope that those who first waited for the coming of the Messiah experienced. We will hear more from Isaiah, we will hear of John the Baptist and Mary. Advent, in the very midst of the hustle and bustle to get ready for Christmas, is a time to "wake up" to God's love for us and the call to love one another as God loves us.

As important and necessary as it is to ready our homes for Christmas, or to buy gifts for those we love, or to prepare for celebrations and parties that give expression to our hospitality, let us not forget our need to ready our hearts again for the ways Christ comes to us, to gift ourselves with some moments of quiet and reflection to see where the darkness in us craves the light of Christ’s transforming love, and to prepare our inner selves to celebrate anew “Emmanuel, God-with-us.”

**May the hope and prayer of Isaiah guide our journey through Advent:
*“Come, let us walk in the light of the Lord!”***

[Thoughts and reflections on Advent I from: Father James McBurney, OSA; Father Larry Gillick, SJ; Bishop Thomas J. Gumbleton; www.christdesert.org and my own]