

1st Sunday of Advent, year C, Xavier Church, Jer. 33, 14-16; Ps. 25, 4-5. 8-10. 14; 1 Thess. 3, 12 – 4, 2; Lc. 21, 25-28. 34-36. Ward Biemans SJ

Dear brothers and sisters, during Advent, we focus our desire in prayer on the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ in our midst. In our Catholic tradition, there is a threefold coming of our Lord: more than two thousand years ago, Jesus has become a human being, this is called the Incarnation, or also his first coming. We celebrate his birth with Christmas. We still expect His return in glory, which is the second way of his coming among us. And thirdly, in every Eucharist we celebrate his hidden coming in our midst, in Word and Communion, in prayer and charity.

Today's Gospel speaks about the coming of the Son of Man with power and great glory, so his second coming. Prior to this, there will be all sorts of frightening signs. Today, it is easy to see all kinds of signs that might point to the end times: the corona pandemic, climate change... But Jesus tells us that all these frightening signs should not make us afraid, but that instead we have to be vigilant at all times, and patient too, because our salvation is near. We know that in the Bible it is written that at the beginning of Creation, on the first day according to the book of Genesis, God's word has sounded: 'Let there be light!' Light and darkness became separated, and then also the water of the sky and the waters of the earth separated. All creatures obey the word of God; they cannot do otherwise. But to us, God's people, He has given freedom. He has made clear in a very special way what is the meaning and purpose of our lives: through the Incarnation of the Son of God, Jesus Christ, God's love has been revealed to the world. The words Jesus has spoken to us, they prepare us for our ultimate destination, which is eternal life. Therefore, we should pray and be vigilant so that the hour will not come as a surprise, but that we are ready.

In today's Gospel, Jesus says that the day of His return will come for all people, everywhere in the world. Therefore we should not let our hearts become drowsy from carousing and drunkenness and the anxieties of daily life. In our times, we could add the intoxicating effects of drugs or watching addictive series on Netflix or television. Neither should we give in to fear, or aggression because of what happens in our society, or constantly strive for more material possessions. In the end such things cause us more stress than we would like. And worse, they distract us from our prayer, they can dull our conscience and take away our upright cheerfulness.

Dear brothers and sisters, Advent is a time of preparation for Christmas, when we celebrate the birth of the Son of God. It is a time to look forward longingly, and also a time to become even more aware of this great and joyful mystery of his Incarnation.

Therefore, this time takes up four weeks, in which we gradually receive more light into our darkness. This is symbolized by the Advent wreath, on which the light will gradually increase.

In the first reading we heard that in the days in which the just shoot of David has come, the city of God will be safe. The prophet Jeremiah describes a vision in which there is once more joy and gladness, singing for groom and bride, days in which the Lord is praised and the land restored. For Jeremiah, apparently, these matters belong together, praising God, celebrating the marriage covenant between husband and wife and the return of deep joy and peace. We share the desire for the coming in glory of the Messiah with the Jewish people, out of which Jeremiah and all the other prophets of the Old Testament came.

For us as Christians, the words of St. Paul are of particular importance, that we may grow in love for each other and for all people. He prays that our love may increase ever more and more in knowledge and every kind of perception. For instance, by being attentive to what the people around us need. Or by supporting deacon Joachim's charity project for Lebanon and Syria.

The time of Advent is a good time to reflect on how we can make love for our neighbour grow in our own lives, in our prayers and in our concrete actions. May for this purpose the coming month be full of blessing. Amen.