

1st Sunday Advent, Jr. B, Xavier Church, Isa. 63, 16-17.19; 64, 3b-7; Ps. 80, 2-3, 15-16, 18-19; 1 Cor., 1, 3-9; Mk. 13, 33-37.

Fr. Ward Biemans SJ

Dear brothers and sisters, in this first weekend of Advent, we look forward expectantly to the coming of Christ. We know, that God is faithful and will not abandon us. But we also know, that we are not there yet, that life is not always a paradise. In fact, the whole life of us Christians can be described with this short formula: 'already, but not yet.'

What is meant by that? The first part: 'Already', means that as Christians we are aware that Christ has come to earth to redeem us. He has suffered for us and has died on the cross, and on the third day He has risen. By doing so, He has delivered us from the grip of evil and we may look forward to eternal life. 'Already' we may live in this joyful expectation.

But at the same time we recognise all too well the complaint of the prophet Isaiah: 'We have all withered like leaves and our sins blew us away like the wind.' However much we try, we remain vulnerable people. Because of this, we sometimes forget the joyful perspective of the Gospel in which we may live. Isaiah writes that when we forget to call on the Name of the Lord, God turns his face away from us. This is the experience of the people of Israel. That is why they call on the Lord in their prayer: 'Lord, you are our Father; we the clay, you the potter, we are all the work of your hand.'

It can also be our experience, that we no longer recognise God because we feel lost in the world. We may be overwhelmed by the news, of war and aggression. Or we search for the spiritual in our world, but we do so along all kinds of detours. Many people forget that God can be found in the Bible, through the sacraments of the Church and in personal prayer.

The Advent season can be a time to delve more deeply into sacred Scripture, prayer and the life of the Church. It can be a time of inner reflection, even of conversion. We can come to conversion, first and foremost, by giving thanks to God.

St Paul writes to the Christians of Corinth: 'I thank him that you have been enriched in so many ways, especially in your teachers and preachers.' We may think of St Francis Xavier, patron of our church, whom we celebrate this weekend, or of Pope Francis, who guides the church in our days. We believe that our heavenly Father remains faithful to us and send us messengers to proclaim the Good News. After all, he has sent us his

own Son. And at the same time, we look forward to Christ's return. That is the experience of the 'not yet', living in expectation of the full revelation of Jesus Christ.

That is why the evangelist Mark says three times: be vigilant. For we do not know when the moment will come. The moment means the return of Christ at the end of time. The 'kairos' in Greek, the auspicious moment, when the Kingdom of God will be definitively established.

Nobody knows when that moment will be. Not even the angels, not even the Son, only God the Father. But we do see the signs, already now. We see the return of light, starting with one candle on the Advent wreath. We see nature coming to rest, the days shorten, only to start anew. We see it in the new church year, of which we are at the beginning today. We also see signs of the coming of Christ in the lives of the saints, like St Francis Xavier. We remember how he travelled tirelessly as a missionary in the 16th century, to India, Japan, and Indonesia, how he catechised countless children and adults and baptised them. His life was a sign of God's presence in our midst, a sign also that faith and justice can increase thanks to our efforts and prayer. Thus, we may now look forward with hope to the coming of the Christmas child in our lives. And we do this in the knowledge that although the completion of God's Kingdom is 'not yet' realised, we are 'already' living in the expectation of this final, perfect peace and joy. Amen.