

**Homily      Advent 1      Sunday 29th November, 2009.**

**Mass Readings: Jeremiah 33:14-16; 1 Thessalonians 3:12-4:2; Luke 21:25-28, 34-36.**

A woman went into her bank one day and asked the cashier to cash a cheque for her. Referring to the bank's policy the cashier asked her for identification. The woman looked at him with complete bewilderment and said: "But Jonathan, I'm your mother!" It's a funny story I know. How come I fail to recognise the Messiah?

*"Watch yourselves, or your hearts will be coarsened with debauchery and drunkenness and the cares of life, and that day will be sprung on you suddenly, like a trap."*

Don't let's think that words such as debauchery and drunkenness don't speak to us, because they can take on a much wider meaning than their most obvious sense. Drunkenness and debauchery aren't just to do with drink and sex, but perhaps are more concerned also with what we omit to do. Maybe we aren't likely to fall into drunkenness and debauchery as those words are normally understood. That isn't the type of coarseness that usually affects us – but rather two conditions that we could particularly think of at the beginning of Advent; which are nevertheless a type of coarseness. They are, being absent and making false assumptions. There can be coarseness in the spiritual life in terms of procrastination, blindness to the signs of the times, inattentiveness to the moment, a type of indifference to present opportunities and responsibilities – dozing off, not growing, not maturing, idling time away. Also in assuming we know where Christ is, where and in whom He is present. We can be extremely busy rushing around at the same time idling time away. One element of the coarseness of the western world is the gross insensitivity of its busy-ness and its consequent dysfunctional set of priorities which creates a type of blindness. How come I fail to recognise the Messiah?

Advent brings a re-orientation of our use and sense of time. It is this summons that comes through the proclamation of John the Baptist, that we shall be listening to over the coming fortnight, also Isaiah, filled with a call to greater wakefulness and mindfulness of what frequently is staring us in the face but before which we are absent, with our ears and eyes and hearts elsewhere, and therefore coarsened to the needs of the present moment.

How come I fail to recognise the Messiah? It can be related to my being absent from the moment or because of my false assumptions. On Christmas Day we shall listen to the prologue of John's gospel where it is written that "*Jesus came unto His own, and His own recognised Him not.*" They didn't recognise Him because of their assumptions about Him. They knew, they felt, who the Messiah would be – and He won't be like this villager who heals on the sabbath, mixes with low-life, befriends former prostitutes and calls God His Father. Their coarseness and debauchery was their pre-conceptions and assumptions – their certainty – people drunk on their own self-importance. Sometimes one hears it said: "*Oh yes, I know her – not a catholic – but a very nice person.*" Watch yourselves, which means listen to yourselves. There's a type of false assumption that leads us to think that we know where Christ is. Better to acknowledge that there is no place, no person, no situation where He is not present. He is present even in my sins, calling me to turn from them and come back to Him. I may be absent but He never is. "*See I am with you always – even until the end of time.*"

The day of His coming no one knows. When referring to time the scriptures speak of time in two senses. In ancient Greek, in which the New Testament was written, there are two words for time: Chronos and Kairos. Chronos is what we refer to as date, hour and minute sort of time. It's.....(now - hour).....on.....(now - date)..... sort of time, that's chronos. Kairos means significant time. Kairos is the moment of encounter – God's moment. The first words of Jesus in the gospel of Mark are: "*The time has come!*" He doesn't mean it's Wednesday 3<sup>rd</sup> February at 2.33 pm. He's referring to the moment of decision in the history of Israel with regard to God's plan being fulfilled in Himself. When He refers to the day and hour of His return He isn't speaking so much of chronological time but of the kairos moment. Now is the time. This is the moment of decision. The present moment is the only place in which I can meet Him, receive Him, be touched and renewed and changed by Him. That's why it is essentially important that I am here and not somewhere else. It's a fundamental truth to say – 'there is no time like the present.'

I remember once, in my last appointment, at the end of quite a long busy day, and while locking up the church late one night after an evening meeting, say about 11pm, there was a knock on the church door just after I'd closed it. I thought to myself: "Oh no, who can that be.....?" You know the feeling. I opened the door and there was a man standing there and he asked if he could go to confession. It came into my mind to tell him the times of confession but that fortunately didn't come out of my mouth, so he came in and we sat down. "Father forgive me for I have sinned, my last confession was 37 years ago....." That's kairos time. He'd come to a moment, his moment of encounter with God. It was a special moment for him, for me too. Only thanks to God's grace I was there for him, present, not absent, thinking about my tiredness or the inconvenience of the hour, not making false assumptions that he was drunk and irresponsible. We need to be spared that coarseness – absence and presumption. That's what I'm referring to.

Watch! Stay awake! He comes like a thief in the night, be on your guard, stand ready! You don't know the day or the hour, because it's not so much about days or hours but the everyday, the current moment. Advent is the wake up to reality, get a life, call – to be here - now. Advent says: "Be here, now!" Not only does it say: "Look who's coming, but look who's here!" I say I love Him, I say I am here but I can be easily distracted, as we all can in a culture that's drunk on distraction. My body may be here, but my heart, my mind elsewhere. Advent says: "Be totally here – be awake, be ready, be here now."

A young lady was walking through the park, when she became conscious of footsteps behind her. She hastened her step, only to become aware that the person behind her had begun to walk faster also. Obviously, she was quite worried, and she decided to face the situation head-on. She turned round to discover a young man walking briskly behind her. She asked him if he was following her, and, if so, why? The young man was embarrassed, as he began to explain why he was doing what he was. He told her that he had noticed her pass this way every day, that he had become infatuated by her, and that he just had to meet her. The young woman remained silent, while the young man poured out his heart about how much he loved her, and there could be nobody else in the whole world that he could possibly love like he loved her. Retaining her composure, the young woman said. "My sister is much more pretty than I am, and she is coming up there behind you." The young man turned quickly, only to discover that there was no one coming. "You're only making a fool of me," he said. "There's nobody

coming behind me.” The young lady replied very calmly, “Yet you looked around! If you loved me like you said you did, you wouldn’t have looked around to see my younger sister.”

There’s a type of dishonesty if our body is in one place but our mind or heart are elsewhere, or if our words speak one thing, our actions another. What are the things that cause me to turn my head away from Christ, which in a real sense means turning away from the present moment with its needs and responsibilities and challenges? That’s a question for Advent.

Watch! Stay awake! He comes like a thief in the night and He says: “Be on your guard!” We don’t know in advance the moment of encounter. Chronos time we can predict: “I have an appointment on Tuesday at 3 pm.” Kairos time is unknown time. Every person who comes to me, each new moment inaugurates the Advent of the Messiah. Take some time at the beginning of Advent and reflect again on those moments in your past life of encounter with God. What was said to me then, shared with me then, asked of me then. How has it borne fruit? What is asked of me now? How can I use this new season of Advent for celebrating more joyfully, more conscientiously, the sacrament of the present moment?

May God bless you in this holy season as you prepare for His coming now, and at the end of time.