

# First Sunday of Advent

December 3, 2017

By Fr. Christian Bui

Today is the first Sunday of Advent. I think, for many of us, advent is simply a four weeks period, sandwiched between thanksgiving and Christmas, a time to do some shopping and also do a little preparing for the celebration of the birthday of Jesus Christ. To think of it only as a preparation for the nativity of Jesus is only partially true. As a liturgical season the Church intends that we focus on a much greater reality than just a birthday.

Practically all of the scripture that will be read, at least on the Sundays of Advent, will be saying to us in many different ways – “Be prepared – get ready – time is running out – stay awake – put your house in order”. Advent does exhort us to prepare for the coming of our salvation. It warns us that the Messiah is coming whether we prepare or not. In the gospel, we find these mysterious words: “But understand this: if the owner of the house had known what part of the night that the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. Therefore, you also must be ready for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour”. In this case, there is a big difference: the Messiah is not as thief and the watching of terror-stricken fear become the watching of eager expectation.

The great reality that the Church asks us to face is that God is coming in our life and in our world at all times. He is a very active God, not a passive one, waiting for our approaches. This happens to be the time in the Church’s liturgy

when she chooses to stir us up and make us more alert to this aspect of our relationship with God – that he is coming to us with every moment of time that we are given, And so as we approach the anniversary of his historical appearance among us as a small child – it happens to be a very opportune time for all of us to reflect on the “Coming of God”.

Advent, then should be for us a season of hope. It is a word that keeps coming up again and again. After we are told to reform, repent and be ready, we are asked to “wait with hope”. Waiting with hope does present some problems for us. Too often we define hope in terms of things that we know will never happen – like winning a million dollars in a lottery or some similar daydream. Christian hope is a hope that has a strong foundation – a reason to exist. It certainly is not “wishing upon a star”. The hope that Jesus asks us to have has roots in God’s love for us, in the resurrection of Jesus, in his promises that he has made to us and in especially his promise to be with us until the end of the world. This kind of hope is not the result of daydreams. It is a gift of the spirit.

The Church is telling us that that is where we ought to be as Christians. Being good citizens of this world, too often, unfortunately, we share some of the cynicism and unbelief that is around us. Too often our calculations and our plans for our future are not different from those who believe in nothing. Sometimes we act as if God were someone way back in our past. Sometimes we speak of the “good old days” as though God were stuck back there. It is very easy to make a diet of nostalgia, forgetting that God is totally uninterested in the past. It is now and tomorrow, next week and next year where he is desperately trying to get our attention.

There is a proverb that says: “Nothing is more precious than time, yet nothing is less valued”. We seldom think of it as a precious gift – and if we do, we think of it only in terms of how much money I can earn in that “time”. It is very useful to remember that we don’t have an unlimited supply. It will run out. The amount of time that God gives us on this earth is the amount of time he has allotted to each of us to make us ready for heaven.

For all so Advent is a wake-up call reminding us to get serious about how we use “time” It encourages us to be optimistic and hopeful about God’s gifts. Advent reminds us that God will be there – always ahead of us – preparing our way into eternal life. The first reading today from the prophet Isaiah has words that should feed our desire and encourage us to joyfully join in the salvation parade. “Oh, people of God, come let us walk in the light of the Lord”