

Sermon

◆ **First Reading:** *Isaiah 63:16-17; 64:1, 3-8*

◆ **Second Reading:** *1 Corinthians 1:3-9*

◆ **Gospel:** *Mark 13:33-37*

This Sunday we commence into the season of Advent ; the English word “advent” derives from the latin ADVENTUS which means “coming” or arrival. The term, however, originally meant not the arrival of simply anyone but rather that of a person of noble birth. In the season of Advent this person is of course the Lord of Lords and King of kings, Jesus the Saviour ;

This Advent of 2020 won't be the same as last year because the Covid-19 has taken over the run of our lives to a greater or lesser degree ; in the middle of the pandemic muddle, it will be difficult to gear our minds towards the spiritual meaning of Advent ; even as you read these lines, priests in parishes are wondering about how the church services will be celebrated beyond 2nd December, the confusion continues and hopefully in due course we'll be able to give Our Lord a proper welcome into our hearts, BUT there's nothing to stop us from doing that at any time of the year.

Just to clarify the type of liturgical language we use at this time of the church year, for example, the “coming of the Lord” or “we will celebrate his birth on 25th December”!! how would you explain such terms to a person of a completely different religion or of no fixed belief at all?? It's as though the Lord is mysteriously ABSENT for the time of Advent, but he will be with us “again” on 25th December ; “so where would the Lord be from now ‘till Christmas day?” No, he hasn't gone anywhere ; Our Lord is truly present in the Eucharist, therefore he is with us sacramentally ; He is with us when we set our minds to pray ; He is with us when we express thanksgiving and praise for blessings received ; or when we sit and slowly take in a reading from Holy Scripture ; He is with us when we suddenly wake up at 3 in the morning and sense a type of spiritual longing ; so really the better grasp of Advent would be “...TO BE BETTER SPIRITUALLY PREPARED TO COMMEMORATE THE BIRTHDAY OF THE SAVIOUR JESUS..” ; a good starting point into Advent would be to ask ourselves

Where is God in my life presently? ; the opening line in the 1st reading from Isaiah sets-the-tone **YOU, LORD, YOURSELF ARE OUR FATHER, OUR REDEEMER IS YOUR ANCIENT NAME** or if you wish to change the word “Redeemer” for “Saviour”, why not? Or take to heart the image of the Father “You Lord, yourself, you are our FATHER” ; Presently/globally/everywhere we are in dire need of a FATHER, someone we can all turn to and say together “let’s listen to what the Father has to say to us”!! ; with the greatest of respect to our present spiritual leaders, but they are jaded and weakened by their burden of office, also it doesn’t help when we recently had to watch two presidential candidates insulting each other in an open televised forum, that was their “debate” in front of millions : personally, on that night, I despaired of leadership in a world that is now desperately in need of both leadership and vast healing ; as a believer, you may well ask “...and WHERE??? WHERE ARE WE GOING IN THE MIDST OF SO MUCH UNCERTAINTY and PAIN??.” ; again we need a REAL FATHER to see us thru’ ; But the Heavenly Father, in the person of Jesus, is the way ahead and always will be ; We all thought we could make a “better-job-of-life-on-this-planet” entrusted to us and BEHOLD!, a MESS!!!!!(...the list of the MESS would be too long to go into....) It’s as if God has been given the cold-shoulder “leave us alone!, we’ll run the planet our way” ;

The time of Advent is another opportunity to turn around and head towards the road to HUMILITY, in this context, the response to the psalm evokes a “turning-around” towards better conversion **GOD OF HOSTS, BRING US BACK; LET YOUR FACE SHINE ON US AND WE SHALL BE SAVED** then in the 1st verse the image of a FATHER/SHEPHERD emerges **O SHEPHERD OF ISRAEL, HEAR US, SHINE FORTH FROM YOUR CHERUBIM THRONE ; O LORD, ROUSE UP YOUR MIGHT, O LORD, COME TO OUR HELP** ; of course this powerful invocation comes alive when we ourselves are spiritually alive with a desire to get closer to the FATHER of us all ; why don’t you and I enter into this Advent with greater “DESIRE FOR THE FATHER” ,as in, greater desire for God OR alternatively, take some time out and try to imagine what your life would be like WITHOUT THE FATHER!! ...pretend the FATHER has never existed and here you are at the close of 2020, a world in disarray, a pandemic everywhere, and uncertainty all over the place!

Where would you be WITHOUT THE FATHER in the middle of all that?

So I’ll you with these two suggestions as we enter into Advent, reach out to the Lord with some extra prayer time, and formulate your own words of invitation to the FATHER, make him feel welcome and wanted, like two old friends who should have made more effort in deepening their friendship but had allowed the opportunities to slip by, try it! God is more human than you think and is not far from any of us ;

Or use your imagination to see what your life would be like without the presence of the FATHER, would a type of “spiritual loneliness” take over your life?, how would the world seem to you in the absence of Faith? how would you deal with a “NO-GOD-ANYWHERE-SITUATION”? where would you be off to on the road of your own life, with NO FATHER to guide you?

.....Stay healthy.....pray for the down hearted, and for those who have never known the goodness and leadership of the FATHER...

Fr Kieran A. Fitzharris SVD