

NOVEMBER 29, 2020
First Sunday of Advent
Mark 13: 33-37

“KEEP ALERT.”

“When Eisenhower was president of the United States, he once visited Denver. His attention was called to a letter in the local newspaper saying that a six-year-old boy dying with cancer expressed a wish to see the president. One Sunday morning a black limousine pulled up in front of the boy’s house. Ike stepped out of his car and knocked on the front door. The father, Donald Haley, opened the door wearing faded jeans, an old shirt, and a day’s old beard. Standing behind him was the boy. Ike said, “Paul, I understand you want to see me. Glad to see you.” Then he took the boy to the limousine to show it to him, shook hands, and left. The family and neighbors talked about the President’s visit for a long time with delight, but the father always remembered it with regret because of the way he had been dressed. He lamented, “What a way to meet the President of the United States.” If we keep in fellowship with God through prayer, we will keep ourselves spiritually dressed for Christ’s coming at any time.”¹

Today is a new Church year, new liturgical year, so we can say: Happy New Year! Traditionally, we begin this new liturgical year with the First Sunday of Advent, and then another three Sundays of Advent leading up to Christmas. Advent as we know comes from a Latin word which simply means ‘coming’. So, we can speak of the ‘advent of winter’ or the ‘advent of the holiday season’ or the ‘advent of spending’. But what coming are we talking about as Christians? Evidently, it is the coming of Jesus at Christmas, and it is absolutely right, but it is a little more than that.

One of the homilies that I read; the priest explained this in this manner and I would like to quote: “The readings of today’s Mass actually speak of three comings of Jesus. All

¹ www.stories4homilies.co

three are inseparably connected with each other. The first coming is the one we will celebrate at Christmas, the coming of the Son of God as a human being, born of Mary in a stable at Bethlehem. It is this coming that the First Reading from Isaiah looks forward to with anticipation. "Return for the sake of your servants... Oh, that you would tear the heavens open and come down!" cries the prophet. We need our God to come visibly among us so that he can help us to straighten out our lives, so that we may see more clearly in what direction our lives should go, so that we can restore our relationship with our God and with all his children around us. Make us, mould us, heal us – that is the cry of Advent. And it will be answered in the stable at Bethlehem. Second, the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem was an event in the past, a historical event. But there is the coming of Jesus each and every day into our lives. He comes in every person, in every experience, in every happening. Let us not be so busy looking back at the Christmas event that we fail to be aware of his presence here and now. So, St Paul tells the Christians of Corinth in today's Second Reading, rejoicing that Jesus has already come and what it means for our daily lives. "I never stop thanking God for all the graces you have received through Jesus Christ. I thank him that you have been enriched in so many ways." We too can thank God for all that Jesus has brought and continues to bring into our lives, the countless helps he gives us to lead a good life. We do that best by constantly being aware of his presence and action in the people around us. We are helped by so many people, most of whom we do not know, have never seen. For instance, just think of all the people who, by their labours, make available the food and drink we will have this day. Every time we peel an orange or drink a cup of coffee, think of the huge number of people, many of them working under oppressive conditions, who have brought that lovely taste and lovely aroma into my life. How often do I thank God? How often do I thank them? For through them God's love and care come into my life. And that goes on day in and day out; it is so easy to take it all for granted. Today, count your blessings. They are all the sign of Jesus living and active among us, of Jesus coming into my life. Third, when Jesus, at the end of time, will come

to take all creation to himself. So, the Gospel today reminds us of the need to be ready, to be alert, to be awake, not asleep. We have no idea when the Lord will come to call us. Every day in the papers we read of people being snatched away by accidents, car crashes, sudden illnesses. Jesus is like a householder who has gone abroad. He has left his servants – that is, you and me – in charge of his affairs, each one with his own task. What is my task, my role in this world? “Stay awake because you do not know when the master will come back – evening, midnight, cockcrow, dawn.... And he must not find you asleep. Stay awake.” How do we do that? Very simply. We keep in touch with those around us by each day doing our best to live lives of love, of compassion, of forgiveness, of honesty and integrity. We keep in touch with our God through lives of prayer. And the simplest and deepest prayer is to be aware of the active presence of God and Jesus permeating every single moment of every single day. If we live constantly in this way, there will be nothing whatever to fear. We will be ready for the Lord whenever and however he comes and will run forward to meet him as a friend to a friend.”² So, my brothers and sisters, let us keep awake for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ this Christmas, everyday of our lives and His second coming!

Let this be our prayer: “Lord Jesus Christ, we anticipate your coming, help me to be awake and keep alert. We entrust everything to the You as ‘we are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand.’³ Amen.”

² livingspace.sacredspace.ie

³ Isaiah 63: 8 NRSV Catholic Bible Press USA