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1st Sunday of Advent - 28 November 2021

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28 November 2021

First Sunday of Advent

Reflection by Gerard Moore

Introduction

An Advent reflection

How to speak to Advent this year, and perhaps to last year as well? The pandemic is challenging Christian faith, not around medicine and science, but around our social fabric. The social fabric of our town and state, of our nation, of our region, of our cultural alliances. If I could put it with a shock, clearly Jesus is not the answer, rather the Church is! We are in the midst of a social and communal upheaval, one that will send waves across the coming decades: is the Spirit filled community of faith able to bring the healing, the comfort and the hope of Christ?

As we enter the Christmas season through an Advent spirituality, will we have more to offer than tired pieties and studied avoidance of the situation in our midst. Starting from home, the Australian community is in its second year of isolation, loneliness and for a hidden number, impoverishment. Our leadership seems fractured. This might be overplayed as the federal and state governments take somewhat diverging paths but actually in much the same direction. The political exchanges are frustrating but they are not characterised by much of the feral behaviour and divisions seen in North America, and extreme views in Australia have not taken too much hold. The leadership picture is dispiriting, but the pandemic is a constantly unknowable dynamic and seems to chart a different course at short notice.

The suffering is in the community and across the nation. Some states will approach Christmas in a degree of security, others in fear of further restrictions and lockdown. Yet all are affected. For a second year, grandparents will not hold grandchildren, newborns will not be cradled by kin, families will not meet unless by zoom, cultural ties will be hampered. For a second year the elderly in care will be left with few visitors; young people seeking romance will be left without places to go or people to see; school children will be left completing a year without accomplishment; teachers, nurses, police, medical services, doctors and social workers will be exhausted; workers will have pivoted so much that they are dizzy. It is a long and tiring list, which trails on.

So, will the feast of Christmas be a break? There are already challenges around gift buying, delivery, and organising get togethers. There may be no cricket for the distraction of many or a few. Holidays and travel seem almost tangible but planning remains a lottery.

What is the 'coming', the *adventus*, that we celebrate? The feast of the coming of Christ is not a distraction from our woes but an advent of hope and light. The need for hope today, in the midst of COVID-19 and its multiple variants, is far different from that of other years. We need to do more than recognise the love around us, the

graciousness of giving, the joy of family and the challenge to be our best selves. We are confronted with a crisis in and of community itself, and we are best placed to respond as a community, as a church. Perhaps our focus this time should turn from how we gather at the Eucharist, how can we worship, to how does our worshipping community offer hope to a tired suburb, a fatigued city, a drained community. This is a struggle indeed, as we are within this suburb, city and community, and equally drained and fatigued and tired. What does the indwelling of Christ give us that we can use to be a support?

It would be good to stop here, but there is another dimension of our Spirit inspired mission. We live surrounded by countries and connected to cultures that have not fared so well. What is our Christmas gift beyond our shores?

Penitential Act

Use one of the *Roman Missal* texts or this optional litany form:

Lord Jesus, you revealed yourself to humankind with power and glory.
Lord, have mercy.
You are the righteous one from the Father.
Christ, have mercy.
You came and we are redeemed.
Lord, have mercy.

The Advent Devotions

The Advent Wreath is a popular devotion for this season, focusing on the twin themes of the light and the coming near of Christ.

Collect

*Grant your faithful, we pray, almighty God,
the resolve to run forth to meet your Christ
with righteous deeds at his coming,
so that, gathered at his right hand,
they may be worthy to possess the heavenly kingdom.*

Advent opens with a call to run forth to meet the Christ, however it is not the babe in the manger. The Christ to whom we run is the one who is to come, in whom is the fulfillment of all things. Advent, then, begins with a focus on the second coming of Christ, a perspective carried in the first Advent Preface: *when he comes again in glory and majesty.*

Our collect has a sense of energy and purpose. The use of 'run' is quite common in the ancient orations and conjures something of that running to the empty tomb on Easter morning, and even the eagerness of the forgiving father to meet his prodigal son (Lk 1:11-32). We need to be mindful that the prayer is a petition. There is no claim to privilege or worthiness here. Rather we are seeking the eagerness to propel ourselves to the coming One because we have in grace lived as fully as possible

within his righteousness. The end point is to be 'gathered' into Christ, conveying warmth and intimacy: disciples are gathered. Further to 'possess' means to fully belong and to be taken up by. With the coming of Christ is our perfection (in his righteous deeds), belonging (gathered) and fulfilment (possession).

First Reading

Jeremiah 33:14-16

Our Advent readings open with the proclamation of the Lord our Justice. It is a statement of hope beyond the environment of despair and disappointment that was the lot of the Jewish people in exile.

Psalm

Psalm 24(25):4-5,8-9,10,14

To you, O Lord, I lift my soul.

The psalm looks with confidence to a God who is truth, teacher, saviour; who will show the path to those who stray and who is faithfulness and love.

Second Reading

1 Thessalonians 3:12-4:2

To strengthen the community, Paul prays for an increase in love, enabling the members to conduct themselves within the holiness of God

Gospel Reading

Luke 21:25-28, 34-36

In the Gospel we are reminded that The Christ will return and live now so that we may stand before God.

Reflection

Our Advent readings open with the proclamation of the Lord **our** Justice. It is a statement of hope beyond the environment of despair and disappointment that was the lot of the Jewish people in exile. This text within the Book of Jeremiah apparently was written later and added to the corpus of poems from the prophet. The reading opens into the period where the exile was coming to a close, and with it the uncertainty whether it would be better to stay in exile or return to Jerusalem or simply merge into the empire of the Persians. The poet maintains the people's hope. There will be a time when their homeland will be safe for them. There will be a time when God's city will be secure. There will be a time when the people more strongly feel the justice of God. Indeed, they will feel it as 'our' justice, justice brought by God for

them. With it are a couple of features. This justice is that already promised by God, so it has begun to take hold. It is for a united 'house', Israel and Judah together, the two parts of the kingdom at peace. It is framed within the legend of the beloved king David. The line of David may be no longer extant, but the spiritual lineage of David's leadership is maintained.

Referring back to our introduction to the theological dynamics of Advent, we can see how this reading introduces us to the central themes of the season: hope, looking forward, the coming of the one, the reign of justice. But our Advent this pandemic year/s cannot have the luxury of looking forward without being part of the solution. As a community of faith, we are in the midst of 'exile', physical, spiritual, communal. For this writer, now is the time for the parish and faith community to be the hope, to be the unifier, to be the safety and security for others. If the coming of the saviour is the source of hope, we the people of the Christ-child are asked to be bringers of hope into the festivities that the nation celebrates.

The first Letter to the Thessalonians has two endings. It seems that Paul finished and then got up another burst of energy, and on he went. Our passage is from the first 'ending', and contains a moral exhortation: *Finally we earnestly ask and exhort you ...* Of course, there is also a second letter to the same group. It seems Paul was keen to keep in correspondence with this community.

As with our first reading from Jeremiah, the text puts forward a theology for Advent. It is not quite 'behave yourself' but a richer spiritual exhortation. Beginning with a prayer that God will increase the love in the midst of the community, it also acts as a reminder to the women and men that love is at the centre of the Christian life and our conduct should take its cue from this.

With this there are some deeper concepts. Our love should reflect the holiness of God. 'Holiness' is an attribute of God alone: for Paul we are called to love as God loves. It is wholehearted and blameless. Here is the sense of what it means to 'please' God. It is far from doing things to win favour. Rather it is to act in such a way that God 'recognises' the divine within us and the transformation it achieves as we take up the fullness of being loved by God. This transformation is the grounds for Jesus recognising us as his own when he returns.

Again, we can see the theology of Advent being opened for us. Right behaviour, loving as God loves and living within the 'recognition' of God all are concerned with our conversion. These match one of the ancient origins of Advent as a season in preparation for baptism.

With this is the understanding of the Second Coming of Christ. This becomes a theme of the final two weeks of the season.

The pandemic is asking us to offer to the community this Advent response. As I am writing the phone interrupts with a call from a friend and colleague who has spent the evening prior helping a neighbour through lockdown induced depression. In our environment, to see ourselves as 'conducting ourselves to please God' is to recognise the pain and suffering around us and from our isolation bring community and hope. Let us be recognised by Jesus because of the hope we bring.

Our Gospel reading, made from two passages from the one chapter in Luke, aligns with our first two readings. In this, two Advent themes are brought to the fore. The

Christ will return, and consequently live now so that you may stand before God. Yet this is a stark reading, with apocalyptic currents and a degree of despair. In a way, the evangelist has Jesus addressing the Christian community of the future. Just as in Luke's Gospel Jesus soon will face his passion, so will the future church soon enough face a time of trial and passion of its own.

The trigger for this is a set of events that are part of the life of the community Luke is addressing in his narrative. Already the Temple has fallen, already Jerusalem has fallen, what then is left? The answer is that life in Christ does not mean escape from the realities of history, but that there is another outcome, one formed in Christ. In response, the Gospel teller is calling his hearers to live within the actual moment, to be aware of what is around, to avoid escapism, to wait upon the Lord.

The apocalyptic nature of the text can be jarring, and that is the intention of the narrator. We are meant to be confronted, to be called to account, to be roused and surprised. Interestingly there is a degree of apocalyptic thought in our culture at present, but more to the point there is a strong dystopian element to our stories, novels and streaming series at present.

What then is the time of trial we are facing, what is the 'passion' we are undergoing. Once more the reading allows us into ways of thinking through the pandemic. However, the apocalyptic note of the readings and the dystopian preference in literature and the arts is pointing us to the crisis of climate change and the dangerous predicament of our sister earth. In the face of these, we are called to be vigilant and to have the strength. In the coming feast of the nativity, we take the incarnation of Christ as the centrepiece of our lives. We cannot take the incarnation with full seriousness without taking up our current situation, our human condition and the condition of creation.

Perhaps it is time to bring in Pope Francis:

This sister now cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her by our irresponsible use and abuse of the goods with which God has endowed her. We have come to see ourselves as her lords and masters, entitled to plunder her at will. The violence present in our hearts, wounded by sin, is also reflected in the symptoms of sickness evident in the soil, in the water, in the air and in all forms of life. This is why the earth herself, burdened and laid waste, is among the most abandoned and maltreated of our poor; she "groans in travail" (*Rom 8:22*). *Laudato Si!* paragraph 2.

Come Lord Jesus!

Come the church of Jesus the Lord!

Prayer of the Faithful

Introduction

As we begin our new liturgical year in this season of Advent, we submit our needs to you with humble hearts.

Petitions

We pray for the Church, especially Pope Francis, that through him the Church will continue to zealously use the instruments of God's love as we walk the journey to the Synod of Bishops. May the work of the Plenary Council in Australia enrich the Church.
(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for leaders of all nations that you grant them discernment so that they can govern the people with compassion and love, particularly as we continue to endure the pandemic.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for those who are suffering at this moment, especially those who suffer physically and spiritually, that you will console them with your mercy. We pray particularly for those suffering mental illness due to the pandemic.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for our Christian brothers and sisters who are persecuted for their faith, that your Spirit will strengthen them so that their faith will not fail.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for ourselves gathered around your altar that your Holy Spirit will continue to grant us communion and the spirit of service so that we may better serve our parish community in this busy pre-Christmas period.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for those who are impoverished by the pandemic that they will find the strength to have hope for the future and that family, friends and neighbours will help in every way they can.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

Conclusion

In these difficult times we offer these petitions in the sure hope that they are heard and granted according to God's will through the power of the Spirit and in the name of Christ Jesus.

Amen.

Music selections by Alessio Loiacono and Chris deSilva

GA

Advent litany. B. Farrell. 279

O come, O come Emmanuel. J. M. Neale et. al./ Gregorian Chant Melody. 285

Wait for the Lord. Taize. 283

Wake, O wake, and sleep no longer. J. S. Bach. 282

AOV1

First Sunday, Advent. C. Smith. 108 (Entrance Antiphon)

O come, O come Emmanuel. J. M. Neale et. al./ Gregorian Chant Melody. 174

AOV2

Open the heavens. B. Boniwell. 163

AOV4Kids

Christmas is coming. J. Bell. 55 (Verse 1)

O Emmanuel. M. Mangan. 52

AOVNG

Come, O Lord, and set us free. Mike Balhoff/Gary Daigle/Darryl Ducote. 31

CWB

Come, O long expected Jesus. Charles Wesley. 657

The coming of our Lord. Charles Coffin, Tr. Anthony G. Petti. 816

Wake, awake! For night is flying. Philipp Nicolai/Tr. Catherine Winkworth. 853

CWBII

Sunday by Sunday hymn suggestions

Come, O long expected Jesus. Charles Wesley. 232

Open the heavens, Lord. Brian Boniwell. 243

The coming of our Lord. Charles Coffin, Tr. Anthony G. Petti/John Chandler. 248

Wake, O wake! the night is dying! Philipp Nicolai, adapt. Harry Hagan OSB. 252

Advent Litany. Bernadette Farrell. 253

To you, O Lord, I lift my soul. The Grail/ICEL. 632

Additional selections by Chris deSilva

Come to set us free. Bernadette Farrell. 233

Wait for the Lord. Taizé Community. 251

City of God. Daniel L. Schutte. 453

S&S1

To you, O God, I lift up my soul. Bob Hurd. 60

City of God. Dan Schutte. 106

Find us ready. Tom Booth. 109

S&S2

To you, O Lord. Timothy R. Smith. 251

Come, O Lord. Pedro Rubalcava. 287

Emmanuel. Steve Angrisano. 290

I trust in you. Greg Lee and Bobby Fisher. 291

Psalms Selected by Chris deSilva and Angela McCarthy

Psalm 24: *To you, O Lord, I lift my soul.*

Psalm 24: Robert J. Thompson/Joseph Gelineau SJ. CWB 168

Psalm 24(25): Christopher Willcock SJ. CWB 592

Psalm 25: *To you, O Lord:* Christopher Willcock. GA 26

Psalm 25: Jenny O'Brien. JOBC pg. 8

To you, O Lord: Paul Mason. PM pg. 22

To you, O Lord, I lift my soul. LPC. Marty Haugen p.5

Music selections by Michael Mangan

O Emmanuel (TT/SYJ/CWBII) [Gathering, Communion, Recessional]

Come, Lord Jesus, come CH & V1 (SYJ/ CWBII) [Advent Wreath]

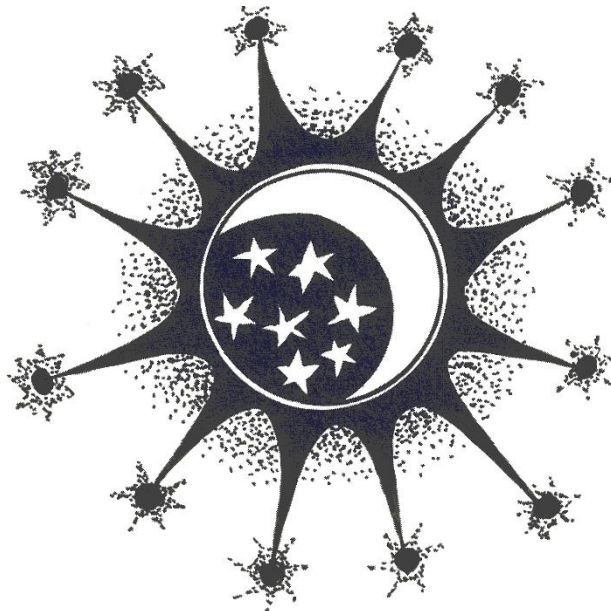
Help me know your ways (FWS) *based on Ps 24 (25)* [Gifts]

To you, O Lord (LCC) *Ps 24/25 (Chn's Lectionary)* [Psalm, Gifts]

Watch out, wake up (TT/SYJ) [CHILDREN: Gathering, Recessional]

We come, we come (TWB) [Communion – esp V3]

Waiting for the child (TT/SYJ) [Non-Scriptural Reflection - Gifts]



***There will be signs in the sun
and the moon and the stars.***