

Commentary on Sunday Scripture – Year B

First Sunday of Advent

First reading:

(Isaiah 63.16-17; 64.1, 3-8)

A Thrill of Hope

Each Advent Sunday begins with a reading from Isaiah, for Isaiah is the great prophet of the Messiah. This reading is taken from the latest part of the Book of Isaiah.

After the return to Jerusalem from exile in Babylon the Jews were passionately awaiting the coming of the Messiah. They were conscious that they had sinned and deserved their punishment, but still longed for the liberation from foreign interference that the Messiah would bring.

After the coming of Christ we are in much the same position of waiting for the fulfilment of the sovereignty or kingship of God. Jesus brought the pledge of this kingship by his miracles of healing, his welcome to sinners, his teaching about the Kingdom and, above all, by his Resurrection from the dead. We no longer have any reason to fear death. We are conscious of our own failings, of our cooperation with evil, and long for the strength and fidelity that wholehearted membership of God's Kingdom would bring us.

Question:

How do I need to change to become a fully committed member of God's Kingdom, to welcome the Messiah into my life?

Second reading:

(1 Corinthians 1.3-9)

Waiting for the Lord Jesus

This reading from the opening of Paul's first Letter to the Corinthians is full of the excitement of the Spirit. The young community of Christians at Corinth was full of the activity of the Holy Spirit, not just extraordinary things like speaking in tongues, but healing and teaching and guidance. Even being a good member of a family (husband, wife, parent, child) is an activity guided by the Spirit.

All this was preparing for the final coming of Christ. For all Christian activity, no matter how humdrum, is given life and vitality by the Spirit of Christ. There was a freshness and enthusiasm that is sometimes lacking in our Church today. Paul does not hesitate to tell them that they were 'richly endowed with the Spirit'. So, of course, are we.

But he is going to go on and tell them that their squabbling is damaging their service of the Lord. Let us ask at Christmas for a new infusion of the Spirit that will help us to burst the bonds keeping us back from full service to the Lord.

Question:

How is the Spirit visible in the Church today?

Commentary on Sunday Scripture – Year B

Gospel:

(Mark 13.33-37)

The Watcher at the Door

This brief parable of the master returning unexpectedly is typical of Jesus' vivid way of speaking. The message is typical, too, for Jesus was constantly stressing that there is no time to lose.

In the gospel of Mark, especially, there is a feeling of hurry: in Chapter 1 alone there are 14 instances of 'immediately'! When Jesus came in his earthly ministry, he again and again challenged his hearers to make up their minds now, to change their ways now. He challenges us to do the same.

We can hear the rattle of the returning Master's key in the lock. There is no time to hide the contrabands, to pull our uniforms straight before greeting the Master at his entry. Even if we do not think that the world's end is imminent, even if death is not threatening, every moment counts, every decision is for or against Jesus. Saints are rumoured to have said that, if they received the news that they were to die that night, they would carry on doing what they were doing anyway.

Is this really a Christian attitude? If we need to put things a bit more in order to prepare for the Lord's coming, is there any valid reason to delay? The four weeks of Advent are anyway a good time to clean things up for the Lord's coming.

Question:

What do I need to change in my lifestyle?
