

Beloved in Christ, during Advent we focus on waiting, waiting for the Second Coming of Jesus. Anytime we are waiting, we do so because we expect something to happen; we wait for a bus or train because we expect it to arrive. When we are waiting for a bus or train, we cannot see it coming, but hope it will come. During Advent, we are waiting for the Second Coming of Jesus, because the Second Coming of Jesus will bring all God's plans for the world to completion. Jesus' words in the Gospel, today, express the mood of this early part of the Advent, " **Be on your guard, stay awake, because you never know when the time will come**" (Mark 13:33). In the first reading, the Jews expressed hope in God even when going through a difficult time and so we heard glimpses of hope in that reading, "Return, for the sake of your servants... **Oh that you would tear the heavens open and come down** - at your presence the mountains would melt" (Is. 63:17; 64:2 JB). In the second reading, Paul reminds his listeners of the many gifts they have received from God, which will support them until the Second Coming of Jesus, "you will not be without any of the gifts of the Spirit while you are waiting for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed" (1 Cor 1:7).

Isaiah's outpouring is an example of this Divine pedagogy of prayer. Isaiah is speaking from the depths of his heart with utmost seriousness in a dire situation. There will be times in our own lives when we will do the same. Today's First Reading shines in the grace of God. It echoes Divine love that is forgiving towards those who live righteously. As we heard, God gladly meets those who do right, those who remember Him and His Holy ways. But for those who turn their hearts away from the Lord, God treats them as children, disciplining them as a loving Father (Heb. 12:8). When we deliberately turn to sin, our Lord is angry with us. He hides Himself from us because we are like filthy clothes. Like a leaf, the sinners are taken away by the wind to fade away at a distance. We ought to cry like Isaiah – **Oh that you would tear the heavens open and come to our aid. We are the clay, you are the potter; the work of your hands** (Is. 64:1; 8).

Therefore, the question Advent poses for us is not *will you be ready* but *are you ready* – here and now? In other words, you will only be ready for the Lord when he comes if you *are* ready now. As we all know, the man of today's Gospel is Jesus who lived among us on earth in time. He is 'travelling abroad' (ascended into heaven) but he will return. His return will be *unexpected* and *decisive*. No one knows the day or the hour of his coming which will be for all a moment of irreversible judgment. So, what Jesus says to his disciples and to all is simply: **Stay awake (Mk. 13:33-37)**.

What does it mean to stay awake at all times, to be on our guard seven days a week, every week? The Gospel tells us that the man who has 'gone abroad' has left his servants (that's us) in charge: *each with his own task* Luke (12:43), speaking of this God-given task informs us: *Happy that servant if his master's arrival finds him at this employment* Therefore, to be ready for the Lord, awake, on our guard, **is to be occupied now with the task which the Lord has given us**.

Brothers and sisters; being in the right 'space' at the right 'time' is not easy. It requires **honest, and sometimes courageous, discernment**. How many of us turn up to work on time but don't do an honest day's work? Every second of our life is pregnant with the possibility that the Lord will return. Let us do our best to meet the Lord so that we will not be like the servant who says to himself, "My master is taking his time coming", and sets about ... eating and drinking and getting drunk, his master will come on a day he does not expect and at an hour he does not know. The master will cut him off and send him to the same fate as the unfaithful (Luke 12:45-46).

Finally, dear friends, the Gospel reminds us that while Heaven and Earth shall pass away, the Words of the Lord shall not pass away. Every promise that He has made shall be fulfilled. God shall prove His faithfulness to all by His Divine actions. Jesus said to keep awake, in the evening, or at midnight, or at the cockcrow, or at dawn. By this, He meant to be **spiritually active, consistent**. Do not take a break in your spiritual lives to relapse into sin. For that sinful moment may be the moment when you will be called and judged according to the actions of your heart at the moment of physical death. May we be found watching and praying when he comes so that we may inherit the Kingdom prepared for us. Amen!