

GOSPEL

Mark 13:33-37

J Jesus said to his disciples: 'Be on your guard, stay awake, because you never know when the time will come. It is like a man travelling abroad: he has gone from home, and left his servants in charge, each with his own task; and he has told the doorkeeper to stay awake. So stay awake, because you do not know when the master of the house is coming, evening, midnight, cockcrow, dawn; if he comes unexpectedly, he must not find you asleep. And what I say to you I say to all: Stay awake!'

HOMILY OF POPE BENEDICT XVI

30 November 2018 (Excerpt)

Today on the First Sunday of Advent, we enter that four-week Season with which a new liturgical year begins and that immediately prepares us for the Feast of Christmas, the memorial of the Incarnation of Christ in history. Yet, the spiritual message of Advent is more profound and already orients us to the glorious return of the Lord at the end of our history. Adventus is the Latin word that could be translated by "arrival", "coming" or "presence". In the language of the ancient world it was a technical term that indicated the arrival of an official, and especially the visit of kings or emperors to the provinces, but it could also be used for the appearance of a divinity, which emerged from its hidden dwelling-place and thus manifested its divine power; its presence was solemnly celebrated with worship.

By using this term, "Advent", Christians wanted to express the special relationship that bound them to the Crucified and Risen Christ. He is a King who, having entered this poor province called earth, made us the gift of his visit and after his Resurrection and Ascension into Heaven desired in any case to stay with us; we perceive his mysterious presence in the liturgical assembly. Indeed, in celebrating the Eucharist, we proclaim that he did not withdraw from the world, that he did not leave us alone and, even though we cannot see and touch him as with material and tangible realities, he is in any case with us and among us. Indeed, he is in us, because he can attract to himself and communicate his life to every believer who opens his/her heart to him. Thus, Advent means commemorating the first coming of the Lord in the flesh, with his definitive return already in mind, and, at

the same time, it means recognizing that Christ present in our midst makes himself our travelling companion in the life of the Church who celebrates his mystery. This knowledge, dear brothers and sisters, nourished by listening to the Word of God, must help us to see the world with different eyes, to interpret the individual events of life and history as words that God addresses to us, as signs of his love that assure us of his closeness in every situation; this awareness, in particular, should prepare us to welcome him when "he will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead and his kingdom will have no end", as in a little while we shall repeat in the Creed. In this perspective, Advent becomes for all Christians a time of expectation and hope, a privileged time for listening and reflection, as long as we let ourselves be guided by the liturgy, which invites us to advance to meet the Lord who comes.

"Come, Lord Jesus": dear friends, this ardent invocation of the Christian community of the early days must also become our constant aspiration, the aspiration of the Church in every epoch, which longs for and prepares herself for the encounter with her Lord. Come today, Lord; enlighten us, give us peace, help us triumph over violence. Come Lord, we pray precisely in these weeks: "Lord... let us see your face and will shall be saved" (Ps 80[79]: 3), we have just prayed with the words of the Responsorial Psalm. And the Prophet Isaiah revealed to us in the First Reading that the Face of Our Saviour is that of a tender and merciful father who cares for us in all circumstances because we are the work of his hands: "You, O Lord, are our Father, our Redeemer from of old is your name" (63: 16). Our God is a father prepared to forgive repentant sinners and to welcome those who trust in his mercy (cf. Is 64: 4). We had drifted away from him because of sin, falling under the dominion of death, but he took pity on us and, on his own initiative, without any merit on our part, decided to meet our needs, sending his only Son as our Redeemer. As we face such a great mystery of love, our thanksgiving rises spontaneously and our invocation becomes more trusting: Show us your steadfast love, O Lord, today, in our time, in every part of the world, let us feel your presence and grant us your salvation (cf. Gospel acclamation).

continued over page ►

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

What stood out to you from the Gospel or Reflection/ Homily?



Head: What might 'staying awake' mean as described in our gospel passage? Why might this be important?



Heart: What are some areas in your life where you would like to experience Jesus' presence more fully?



Hands: In what ways could you become more attentive to Jesus' presence around you?

PRAYER

Spend some time in prayer with one another:

1. Conscious of what has just been shared, members briefly name/ describe their prayer needs.
2. Intentionally call on the Holy Spirit to be present (e.g. "Come Holy Spirit, please be present as we pray")
3. Offer prayers of thanks and praise to God.
4. Pray for each others' prayer needs. Where appropriate, you may like to encourage the group to place a hand on the shoulder of the individual that you are currently praying for.
5. Conclude your prayer time with another prayer of praise, perhaps praying the 'Glory Be'.