

FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

As were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of man. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, and they did not know until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of man. Then two men will be in the field; one is taken and one is left. Two women will be grinding at the mill; one is taken and one is left. Watch therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. But know this, that if the householder had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have watched and would not have let his house be broken into. Therefore you also must be ready; for the Son of man is coming at an hour you do not expect.

(Mt 24:37-44)

2013 is almost over. The Mayans, a Central American nation who disappeared long ago, had a calendar which only lasted to December 21st, 2012. And so, a few years ago, a film was produced which showed the end of the world on that date, the skies filled with fire, great cities like New York and Rio de Janeiro collapsing into the ground and drowning in the seas. Wow! But it never happened. The movie, however, was one among many stories that speak to us of a sudden and calamitous end where people are overwhelmed like ants in a flood. Jesus speaks of “the days of Noah”: Noah’s Ark embodies this sense of the fragility of the world. Somewhere in our minds we know that the world is fragile, and that we depend at every moment on the air we breathe, the food we eat, the water we drink, the heat we feel, the ground we walk on. Take any of it away and we are gone.

Life is fragile because it is a gift. If we made it ourselves, we could keep it, but we can’t and we all have to hand it over and “go our separate ways,” as the funeral liturgy says. And when that time comes, what shall we do?

This Gospel of the First Sunday of Advent is a Gospel of the end of times: sudden, unexpected, and very unwelcome. It begins Advent because it teaches us what Advent is about: Advent is about being saved. “Who will save me from this body of death?” asks St Paul (Rom 7:24-25), and then answers it himself: “Thanks be to God, through Jesus Christ our Lord.” Nobody can understand Advent until they see the need to be saved, and when we do, here is the message: the Saviour is coming! That is what Advent is about.

We all know people who were one day alive and the next day gone. I know a man who left a grieving family twenty years ago and is still missed. Like the two men in the field or the two women at the mill, he was suddenly taken and his wife was left. When it came to his funeral they spoke about his love for the rosary, his daily reading of the Scriptures. He was an accountant and used his work to devote hours to the poor. When the Son of Man came, he was ready, as if he had spent his life in expectation of the coming of his Saviour.

QUESTIONS

- 1) Jesus describes God as a thief – what does he mean by that?
- 2) If Advent was only about preparing for Christmas, it wouldn’t make sense to begin with a Gospel that speaks of the end times? So what is this Gospel doing here on the First Sunday of Advent?
- 3) Can you relate the image of the two men in a field and the two women at the mill to someone you know or once knew?

PROJECT

What does Jesus mean by watching and standing ready for his coming? How could you do that? Why not do a special good deed for your neighbour which is done for specifically as if in expectation of the Lord’s coming, remembering that he said to us, “Store up for yourselves treasure in heaven” (Mt 6:19).

