

Readings for Advent Sunday

27th November 2022

First Reading: Isaiah 2:1-5

The word that Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem.

In days to come

the mountain of the LORD's house

shall be established as the highest of the mountains

and shall be raised above the hills;

all the nations shall stream to it.

Many peoples shall come and say,

"Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD,

to the house of the God of Jacob,

that he may teach us his ways

and that we may walk in his paths."

For out of Zion shall go forth instruction

and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

He shall judge between the nations

and shall arbitrate for many peoples;

they shall beat their swords into ploughshares

and their spears into pruning hooks;

nation shall not lift up sword against nation;

neither shall they learn war any more.

O house of Jacob,

come, let us walk

in the light of the LORD!

Second Reading: Romans 13:11-14

Brothers and sisters, you know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers; the night is far gone; the day is near. Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armour of light; let us live honourably as in the day, not in revelling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarrelling and jealousy. Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.

Gospel: St Matthew 24:36-44

Jesus spoke to his disciples: 'About that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. For as the days of Noah were, 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 Noah entered the ark, and they knew nothing until the flood came and swept them all away, so too will be the coming of the Son of Man. Then two will be in the field; one will be taken and one will be left. Two women will be grinding meal together; one will be taken and one will be left. Keep awake, therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. But understand this: if the owner of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake 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 unexpected hour.'

A Reflection for Advent Sunday

You might know this song made popular by Marie Lloyd (among others) in the music halls of the 1920s:

My old man said: "Follow the van,
And don't dilly-dally on the way".
Off went the van with me 'ome packed in it.
I walked behind with me old cock linnet.
But I dillied and dallied,
Dallied and dillied;
Lost me way and don't know where to roam.
And you can't trust a "Special"
Like the old-time copper
When you can't find your way home.

It's a lot easier to get lost than it is to find your way back again. Something I remember from my time with the Royal Navy was how much effort was put in to knowing exactly where a ship at sea was. In my time, at least, there was no reliance on any electronic system to work out where you were, but every fifteen minutes the Officer of the Watch would work out where he or she thought the ship should be and then verify that with sightings of landmarks, lights or whatever else was available, and mark the position on a chart. The idea was that whatever might happen, like an unexpected loss of power or of radio reception, the position of the ship would still be known. If you're heading somewhere it's important to know where you are on the journey, and it's especially important when you're in an environment when all sorts of forces like wind and ocean currents will push you off course.

Similarly, in the journey of life, it's easy to get distracted and pushed off course. Sometimes it's by chance, and sometimes it's by choice; often it's quite trivial, like ending up forgetting why you've gone into a room or started a vein of conversation, but once in a while it can be quite serious, like finding you've missed an important opportunity or allowed an important relationship to drift and die. Most of the time our dillying and dallying leads to nothing more serious than a bit of confusion, but sometimes we can be left feeling utterly desperate and lost.

It was for good reason that the first Christians often referred to their faith as *The Way*. Their allegiance to Christ wasn't so much about personal belief as investing their whole lives into following the example and teaching of Jesus. One of the criticisms sometimes levelled at Christians today is that faith has become largely a matter of individual

belief rather than a way of life lived out in a community. Certainly, in a society which tends to focus on the individual, it's not that difficult to go '*off plot*' and see faith as largely being focused on ourselves – being about what *I* believe, giving *me* comfort and working out *my salvation*. My experience is that looking to yourself on the journey of faith, rather than keeping your eyes '*on the van*' can lead to you get to that point where you feel you're just going around in circles.

This Sunday marks the beginning of the season of Advent, which is a time to take some bearings and think about exactly where we are on our individual life journeys, so we're in a better position to face the unexpected. Are we where we think we should be or have we gone astray? Are we navigating in safe waters, or are we lost? Just as an Officer of the Watch takes bearings from landmarks, Advent is a time to check our position using landmarks such as scripture, the accumulated wisdom of the Church and the relationship we have with God through prayer.

Few, if any of us, will be where we think we are (or should be) on our journey of faith. That isn't a sign of some great spiritual failure or malaise but just a part of being human in a world where all sorts of distractions will lead us to *dilly dally* along the way. Just as the art of seamanship is about being able to navigate amid winds and currents, so the practice of Christianity is about plotting a course which follows Jesus through the distractions of the world. And being human, sometimes we're better at it than we are at others

I hope that this Advent gives each one of us the opportunity to check our '*position*', perhaps by undertaking to read or study a bit more, or to spend some extra time in prayer and reflection. But whatever you choose, I hope that it will give you renewed hope in facing the changes and chances of this fleeting world and help prepare you those unexpected moments when we encounter God in our lives.