

Homily. 1st Sunday of Advent. Year.A. 30/11-1/12/2019.

Awake! Arise! Advent is upon us! These words just about sum up the message God's giving to us as we begin this new year in our Church's cycle of reading, prayers and feasts. The problem with Advent, if I can be allowed to call it a 'problem' is that it's a relatively short season, this year just 24 days or 3.5 weeks long. What usually happens is that we just get into the Advent mood around about Christmastime, then its message and grace gets swamped by worrying about what we've got to do and where we're going over the Christmas festivities and New Year holidays.

This leads me to the other issue with Advent, and the Christmastime weeks that follow. These days are linked into one of our busiest commercial and family times where their meaning gets easily lost in all that's happening. We know it's not meant to be this way, but the reality is that this is how it plays out for us, and none of us can do a lot to change this fact. So, I believe that we have to find Advent in everything that's going on; in our meals and visits, our gift giving and parties, our trips and holidays, and in those precious quiet times we're able to keep secure.

Let's remember that Christ wasn't born in perfect circumstances either. We know that Joseph and a very pregnant Mary were forced into a long and demanding journey from Nazareth, south to Bethlehem, so as to fulfil Caesar's edict. They'd barely arrived, with nowhere to stay, when Mary began her labour so they found themselves put out to where the livestock were kept.

Nor was there a proper bed for the child, so the King of King's and Lord of Lord's ended up in a manger, a humble feed box for the animals. The Christ child was still very small when, according to St. Matthew, mad King Herod went on a jealous killing spree. Once again they had to pick up stumps moving as refugees to foreign Egypt.

All of this was far from ideal and most certainly not what Mary and Joseph had planned and hoped, yet now every single element of this story has special meaning for us, resonating in our hearts and feeling very fitting to the crazy, sometimes messy state of our own lives. Moreover, if this sort of topsy-turvy time was a good enough for God to choose to come amongst us as one of us, then our busy Advent and Christmas weeks ought be good enough for you and me to awake, arise and stay alert to God's grace and work in us, for us and around us.

Our New Year Advent call, then, is enter into the activities of these few weeks finding God present in the people we meet, the parties we have, the meals we share, the journeys we make and the gifts given and received, all the while doing so with our Advent eyes wide open and our Christian minds and hearts alert for where Jesus resting. Of one thing we can be absolutely certain; whatever we do and wherever we go, He'll be their wanting us to see Him coming again in our times, so often in the ways, the people and the times we do not expect.