

Homily. 1st Sunday in Advent. Year. B. 2/3 December 2023.

Our New Season and Year begins as expected with its usual message, asking us to wake up and and stay awake for the Lord is coming. In terms of where we are this refers to our soon to arrive celebration of Christmas.

The incarnation of God amongst us as one of us did happen in history at a particular time and place, Bethlehem in Judaea over 2000 years ago. However, the birth of Jesus has a relevance that reaches far beyond its time, even affecting us in this present age. Advent aims to prepare us to honour his birth in time by asking us to stay awake and alert to the Lord's brith again and again in us and in all of the events happening around us.

What intrigues me though is the message of the 1st reading. There we hear that we've been left free to stray from the ways of God; that we've been allowed to harden our hearts against God and God's grace; that God accepts and has to deal with our freedom reject God's offer; to sin and to be blown away by our sinfulness like withered leaves. In gospel language God asks us to wake up, whilst accepting our choice to be asleep to God's presence and action in and around us if we so wish.

This is so because God's only motive is love and because God respects us, honouring our will and independence. Gods wants a friendly partnership with real people who respond willingly, not with robots or slaves who must follow programming and obey orders. This risky strategy allows for hurt, harm and the messing up all of God's plans and hopes. It is the only way though that love and freedom can rule rather than fear and the laws of coercion and control.

It's this risky, loving way that led to God's incarnation in Jesus and to our Christmas feast. It's this same loving, respectful motivation that calls us to be awake, now and always, so that we don't end up withering away within, to be blown about like dead leaves in the wind by our sins.

The Advent Season equals awaking; first to the giving and receiving of God and after that our giving and receiving to and from each other. It starts with our prayer, our time, listening and service, the gift of ourselves to others. It ends with our gifts and greetings to each other, our thanks and appreciation of what we share and have in common.

All of this makes us hungry for love that lasts, Christ's self giving to and for us. It is for these reasons that here we do lift up our hearts to the Lord and rightly, always and everywhere, give thanks and praise to the everlasting light of God and the dawn from on high of our salvation.