

Homily **1st Sunday of Advent** (2.12.18)

**'Stay awake' to the promptings of the Spirit.**

**Recognise anew the Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist.**

'The apocalypse'. There's been a few films on tv recently. I watched one last week, which was a caricature of the apocalypse. And all of the ones I've ever seen, including the famous one, Legion, which I saw a while ago, they all bear no relation, or very little relation to the scripture. They're all about horror and disaster and nothing about the coming of Christ, of course. And the trouble with these films is, they are a caricature and they tend to cut us off from any openness to the possibility of a truth in the prophecy. But for me, the truth about Advent is that God is always coming to us. Advent means coming. But he's always doing that. We are the stale ones. Always prone to lethargy, at least I am, and we solve our problems often, or our boredom, I should say, in pleasure-seeking. And pleasure-seeking is always self-centred. Mine is I can spend two hours, if really bored, playing my famous old computer game, Call to Power II, which is about conquering the world, and I really enjoy being evil.

[laughter]

But it rules out life and love. It's a slavery. And we're all prone it. I think it's the drug addiction, finding things to occupy ourselves from boredom or being still. Real drug addiction, taking amphetamines or whatever, I think is only a symptom of what Jesus was talking about,

"Hearts that have become coarsened".

And he gives the examples of drunkenness and debauchery, and the cares of life or in many cases today with the despair in life. Now, search through the Bible, especially the Old Testament, and it's never the faith that's at stake. It's never the faith that's at risk. It's always the faithful. They're the ones at risk. And because when you look in the Old Testament in particular, people are prone to get it wrong every time, caught up in the drug addiction of living for pleasure, that's often the message of the prophets, at the expense of others too. And it's even there, isn't it, when the Israelites are being taken to the Promised

Land, and they're on the way in the desert, and they rebelled against Moses. And they said to him,  
"Let us return to Egypt. At least there we had food and drink".

What does God, what's the most profound thing God has done in response, to that acclamation of those Israelites? The irony is he comes to us as food and drink in the Eucharist to remind us that life is more than simple food and drink. This is the irony of the Eucharist. The Israelites called out,

"Let's go back. We had food and drink".

And yet here God comes to us in food and drink. He is the real food and drink that feeds our real life, our real selves, our deepest desires that lift us out of, hopefully, the false philosophy of eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow you die. And really, the motto of the Eucharist should be,

"Eat, drink and be joyful, for I give you life".

No, the faith is never at risk, for God's truth is eternal. It's the faithful who are always at risk. And I often think this, without God, without faith, we're all vulnerable children and vulnerable adults, because without faith we become stale. We repeat ourselves, especially our mistakes. And our ideas often become arrogant without faith.

'Stay awake' is Jesus's antidote. I haven't checked the New Testament, or the Gospels I should say, but I think there's only one other occasion when Jesus makes such a strong command. Do you know where it is? Gethsemane. Isn't that interesting?

"Wait here," he says to the apostles, who are really a symbol of us in disguise at Gethsemane.

"Wait here," he says, "And stay awake." They sleep. We often sleep through life at times of important decisions and it's Jesus who still comes to us and says,

"So you have not the strength to stay awake with me one hour".

Jesus makes the move. I think that's so true in life, it is in my experience, of my own Gethsemanes or lowest points, something happens, something moving happens or God comes to you in a most miraculous way. In my experience, it's always God who takes the initiative and comes to us, as I say, even in the darkness of our own Gethsemanes.

See, God, unlike us, constantly reveals himself in you and we need that in our staleness. He is a permanent Advent, coming to us because he is life, and as life, he has the power to create and recreate, to make all things new. And God is always coming to us because he is light, and as he himself said,

"You don't put a light under a bushel, you put it on the lamp stand, to enlighten all the house, it cannot be hidden".

And God is always coming to us, because he is love, and love by definition needs to give itself to someone else. That's why God is always coming to us. And so I think that's why Jesus's admonition to stay awake for the strength to survive all that is going to happen is so pertinent, because forget about the apocalypse, forget about the four last things, God is always coming to us individually, to each one of us. So apply that to yourself, that statement. So stay awake and pray for the strength to survive all that is going to happen to me, to you.

He knows that if we do not do so, then we might be overcome by the cares of everyday life and lose sight of the point of living. Now, Advent, which is one of my favourite seasons, is a short time, it's amazingly short, it's barely above three weeks every year. If you work it out, this is the first Sunday of Advent, one week will be the second, two weeks will be the third, and you've no longer got to the fourth in three weeks, it's Christmas the week after, it's never long, unlike Lent, which I hate [laughter], which seems to go on forever, at least six and a half weeks, if not seven. I think it's a powerful symbol, Advent. It is to remind us that life is short. The Advent, my coming into the world, is a short experience and that I need to be alert and stay awake, to meet God who wants to come to me as he comes to us at Christmas.