

First Sunday of Advent
Is 63:16-17.19:64:2-7. I Cor 1:3-9. Mk 13:33-37.



Advent invites us to journey in grace, to live within time as kairos. To savour time's in-breaking moments, its newness from day to day. Advent invites us to draw back from chronological living -where time is the emptiness we stretch and fill with one thing after another. In the poem, Advent, Patrick Kavanagh says that time given to us is a gift, and to live in it with any depth, he recommends we retreat to 'the darkened room'. Because 'through a chink through wide there comes no wonder'. In the liturgy, Advent is a time of wonder and desire.

The texts from Isaiah, part of a longer communal lament (63:7-64:11) written at a time when Jerusalem was still in ruins and God seemed very remote, ground this desire for God. We learn how unashamedly Israel depends on its partnership with the Father / Redeemer God to lift them from spiritual apathy. We note how proactive Israel is in relation to the transcendent, whom 'no ear has heard, no eye has seen', charging God with neglect, urging God to return to his heritage with all the trappings of his majesty. And the reading ends with a note of hope for to know that one's life is in the Potter's hands, is to maintain hope.

Note how prayers from Ps 79 expand on the images from the reading:

O shepherd of Israel, hear us.

((Why, Lord, leaves us to stray. . .)

O Lord, rouse up your might.

(For you hid your face. . .)

Visit this vine and protect it.

(We have all withered like leaves. . .)

May your hand be on the man you have chosen.

(We the clay. . .).

Mark 13:33-37 is Jesus' farewell discourse preparing the community for future events. Mark, influenced by Peter, probably did expect the Parousia, especially as Jesus spoke of an imminent return. In the period prior to the return of the Son of Man he urges vigilance; hence the key phrase 'be awake'. In the Parable of the Doorkeeper, we, the waiting disciples of Jesus are called to be doorkeepers, to be awake for the Master/ Christ's return. But it is not a passive waiting. It is a 'being in charge, getting on with our tasks'. Note that in Mark, *exousia* - power / being in ,... charge - is a weighty term. It is the authority of Jesus himself bestowed on his disciples. Empowered by Him, our role, as was the role of his disciples, is simply one of faithful service, doing what has to be done in the light of the good news. In view of the ending of this gospel this is wise advice: it has a steadying effect. The disciples are facing climactic events, leading to an inbreaking of Divine Presence that could only shatter them. The Son of Man is the Suffering Servant. To know the Father in the Suffering Servant is a call to a 'suffering unto God', which is not necessarily a path of light or of high thoughts but one of daily fidelity and service.

While St. Paul,(I Cor 1:3-9) speaks of divine presence as a straining toward the future revelation of God, yet it is with a great sense of joy and celebration that he asks us to own what has already happened to us in Jesus. Advent must not be a time of anxious striving. If there is any 'striving' it must be an assent again and again to the 'steadiness' of our identity in Christ, who is 'always newly come/ And newly dear / The ages long.' (Alice Meynell).

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