



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

1st Sunday of Advent-Year C-November 28th 2021

Readings: Jeremiah 33: 14-16, Psalm 24, 1 Paul 3: 12-4: 2,

Luke 21: 25-28, 34-36

Some twenty years ago, on my regular visits to a local nursing home, I was always warmly greeted by Helen. Helen was immaculately turned out and physically in pretty good nick for a woman of her age. Her tragedy was, like many of her contemporaries, that her mind was not. Her dementia – that terrifying word that ushers us into the land where all things are forgotten – meant that every visit I was a new person to greet. And, every ten minutes or so Helen would pause, thoughtfully and say to the assembled day room inmates, ‘Does anybody know why we are here?’

For a woman whose past, whose very identity, was now a tabula rasa, a blank screen, and whose present was a daily mystery and for whom the concept of futurity was an inconceivable luxury, it was a very good question. Indeed, being the ultimate existential question it is, of course, really the only one with which we need concern ourselves. I often think of poor Helen as a metaphor for what was once Christendom – afflicted by historical amnesia, conflicted by the present and restricted by a vision of the future that is reduced to the immediate and the material.

For the Church, Advent provides the great antidote to this, otherwise hopeless, tragedy. As Christians, we live between the Advents – the coming of Christ as the child in the arms of Mary and the coming of Christ in glory at the end of time to judge the living and the dead. We have an eye on both. As we follow our chosen pattern of Death, Judgement, Heaven and Hell AND/OR Patriarchs, Prophets, The Baptiser and Our Lady, we are inevitably involved in the recapitulation of our history, the history of salvation, the supreme and superlative reason why. And, remember, it's no good telling people that Jesus is the answer if they never knew the question.

Advent invites us to return to the great pilgrim journey of the people of God in the corporate memory of what has been, the longing for what will be, the excited anticipation of the kingdom and the preparations which we need to make.

Advent reminds us that we are supremely a people of hope and that hope is well founded. My only complaint is that Advent is not long enough for this immense task. I often joke that I am going to write to the Pope to ask for a six week Advent and a four week Lent.

One of the reasons that I look forward to Ronald Crane's wonderful weekly meditation is that he regularly and accessibly opens little gateways into our common history in the Old Covenant and offers profound insight into the long journey of the People of God

As the pilgrim people of God, Advent gives us that opportunity to look back before the first Advent. To recall that original taste of Paradise and the companionship of God rekindling a deep yearning and earnest desire for return. To hear again the slamming shut of the Gates of Eden and see the whirling, flaming swords of the Cherubim barring our return and to know the despair of the lost in the consequent deformity of the destiny of Man.

To mourn the fratricidal strife of Man in the first family and all his descendants. To comprehend the depths of human depravity that made God regret making us and the consequent purging cataclysm of the flood. To hear the call to Abraham to start again, to set out in faith, to see the land of promise, to walk out of burning cities, to negotiate salvation. To stand under desert skies, bejewelled with myriad stars and hear the implausible promise of futurity and blessing for the world.

To walk the heart rending three days to Mount Moriah to sacrifice the gift of Isaac and there, on that same site where, centuries later, Man would not spare the Son of God, God spared the Son of Man and provided his own sacrifice. To know the slavery of Egypt and to stand with Moses before the Bush of Fire and encounter the revelation of the divine name. To keep the Passover, the Mass of all the ages, the Blood of the Lamb turning away the Angel of Death. To follow the cloud of witnesses and be defended by the fire of God. To flee in terror before the enemy only to find ourselves dry-shod in the deep while behind us the forces of the dark lord are swept away in the baptismal torrent of the Red Sea.

To wilderness wander – becoming His people, ready for the Land of Promise. To stand with the prophets and know their agony of heart as the people set off on the long and winding road of disobedience and national apostasy that leads to defeat and exile. and still to know that The Messiah will come.

As we gather our history, our memory, our very identity, so we begin to understand the context of our little story on the vast canvas of the heart of God and the extraordinary panoply of salvation history. Then we are beginning to be prepared for the first Advent. We are beginning to grasp the mind expanding and soul thrilling immensity of the Incarnation. We are on the threshold of the joy from which nothing can separate us in the love of God.

When we come to kneel before the child in the arms of Mary this Christmas, we will do so, not out of sentimentality or synthetic emotion but as followers of the Way, as inheritors of the Kingdom, as fellow pilgrims with the saints, as descendants of the patriarchs, as those who share the trials of the prophets, as the strange forerunners who point to Christ, as the bearers of Jesus into the world, as the latest writers, with our lives, of the next chapter of the Apostles.

Does anybody know why we are here? We certainly do.

Refresh your memory this Advent and, when your heart overflows with joy and thanksgiving, share it with others who have either forgotten or never knew.