

1st Sunday in Advent, 2024

Those who are blessed to be parents or grandparents will no doubt look back to when they first heard those beautiful words, 'We are expecting!', bursting with joy at the announcement of a child in the womb. I know that each time Alice confirmed her pregnancy we were both ecstatic and we couldn't stop counting the days until John and James were born. The waiting seemed to go on forever but when eventually the day of birth arrived that sense of expectation and excitement escalated until the miraculous and indescribable perfect cry came forth from the womb.

In the First Reading there is no doubt that the Prophet Jeremiah is intending to instill in The Chosen People a sense of great expectation for the coming of The Messiah. Speaking on behalf of God he prophesies, 'I will cause a righteous branch to spring up for The House of David, and he shall exercise justice and righteousness in the land.' JUSTICE for the poor, prisoners, the blind and those outcast and downtrodden by both society and by the Jewish authorities. Biblical RIGHTEOUSNESS is summed up in The Beatitudes, 'Happy are those who hunger and thirst for dikaiosune, because they will be satisfied.' Dikaiosune, or righteousness, means being holy by living in right relationship with God, other people, and all creation. It means to live justly, honestly, and faithfully according to God's instruction.

St Paul in 2 Thessalonians endorses the already present but yet not perfect reign of justice and righteousness established by Jesus' Incarnation, 'Brothers and sisters: May the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, so that He may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.'. Note that Paul not only acknowledges that Jesus' first coming brings justice and righteousness to Israel but also points to the future perfecting of Jesus' Kingdom in his Second Coming at the end of time.

It is to this Second Coming which The Gospel of St Luke refers, '... then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.' Jesus here exhorts us to walk tall with our heads held high because on that day, 'He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away.'(Revelation 21 :4)

As we await patiently with heightened expectation for the coming of Jesus at Christmas, a reality made present here and now through the signs and symbols of The Sacred Liturgy, we also are encouraged by Sacred Scripture to feel the salvific tension, pointing us to the final coming of Jesus.

So as we truly accompany the lowly Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem in The Sacred Liturgy in the present moment; as we watch them search in vain for lodgings; as we are with them in that humble cold stable; as we witness the Birth of Jesus of the line of David, as prophesied by Jeremiah, we are reminded that in our troubled world and in our personal pains and suffering Jesus will have the final liberating word on the last day. Doesn't Jesus say at the beginning of his ministry in the synagogue at Nazareth, 'ALL AUTHORITY has been given to me to bring Good News to the poor, liberty to captives, sight to the blind and freedom to the downtrodden.' Our waiting for Christmas and for The Second Coming must therefore be a waiting full of hope and trust that in Jesus, 'all will be well, all manner of things will be well' (Julian of Norwich, great medieval female mystic). God never lets us down.

Let us today be reassured in our faith, Jesus not Putin or Trump or any other of the worldly rich, or those who use advances in medicine and technology for profit and for the harmful manipulation of creation will have the final word. Paraphrasing the words of Handel's Messiah: 'For HE and NOT THEY shall reign for ever and ever!'

Footnote:

We pray for and remember also those who have lost babies through miscarriages or in infancy, that The Lord comforts them, in the sure knowledge that they have very special little saints interceding with God on their behalf in the perfect happiness of Heaven.