

Each Sunday in the Advent season, the homily will be published on the Parish website. I will offer some questions for you to think about week by week. Your feedback would be appreciated at flemingmichael@rogers.com

ADVENT ONE DECEMBER 2023

Isaiah 9: 2-7 Psalm 80: 1-7, 17-19 I Corinthians 1: 3 -9 St. Mark 13: 24 – 37

Today, we enter the sacred season of Advent, the time when the Church is called to “prepare the way of the Lord” and to prayerfully think of the new year of the Christian calendar. It is a time for reflection on the past, consideration of the present and anticipation for the future. It is also a time when we as individual followers of The Way pause from the business of our lives to spend and, to quote St. Mark, find “a quiet and lonely place” where we can simply sit and be in the presence of God.

Our Advent time begins with the words of Isaiah which have been borne across millenia by the hearts and voices of generations who seek the Lord. Like all prophetic writings, these words are rooted in real history and the lives of real people. While there may have been at least three authors of the Prophecies of Isaiah, we do know that a prophet by that name was living in the middle of the eighth-century BCE and that he spent a great deal of his time referring to the political realities of his day. In a time when the kingdoms of Israel and Judah were the “punching bags” of their neighbours, Isaiah gives hope to his people who are “walking in darkness”, filled with fear and uncertainty because they do not sense the presence of the Lord in their midst. To many, Yahweh has retreated up the mountain and sits there, seemingly either the author of the misfortunes being visited upon the people or being an indifferent deity who is leaving the people up to their own devices. It is in the heart of that darkness that Isaiah declares that there is light. Isaiah foretells of the defeat of the bearers of the darkness and to those who call out in the wilderness of their lives, “O Lord, where are you?”, the prophet declares, “to us a child is born, for us a son is given.” This is a refinement of what Isaiah declared earlier when he said, “A virgin will be with child and bear a son and will call him Emmanuel (God is with us)”.

The psalm for this new day shares the theme of light breaking through darkness, as the poet says, “Restore us, O Lord, let your face shine”. As I read these words, I am drawn back to the creation story in Genesis in which the author says, “Now the earth was formless and void, and darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of

God was hovering over the waters. And God said, 'Let there be light' and there was light." I have this image of God gazing through the darkness, chasing the shadows to the very edges of the universe and then smiling the smile of the ages roaring with delight, "This is good." For me, my God has a face which is a reflection of the brilliance of light of creation, offering me hope in dark times and the sound of laughter in the midst of tears.

This is reflected in Paul's letter to the Corinthians where he speaks to them of the constancy of their faith - no matter how dark and treacherous life seems, he says, the Lord is faithful to those who love him and call upon his name. Paul is obviously very supportive of the community because of its witness to the ministry and teachings of the Carpenter King: he is so sure of his sisters and brothers that he calls them "sanctified and called to be holy" and knows that the faithfulness of the people is surpassed only by the faithfulness of God towards his beloved ones.

God's loyalty and faithfulness, Paul believes, will last beyond the end of time and the "adventus" of the Lord when he comes to bring in all its fulness and power the peaceable kingdom of His Father. Once again, the theme begun today by Isaiah finds its reflection in Paul's musings to and about this fellowship of faithful pilgrims of and on The Way.

The gospel for this morning is a part of what is called "the little apocalypse" - it is Mark's reflection on the prelude to the Day of Promise - the day when the Lord shall return and restore the world. Scholars believe this thirteenth chapter was written around 70 CE, some forty years after the death and resurrection of Jesus and that the "abomination of desolation which stands where it ought not to be" refers to a statue of the Roman Emperor which was placed in the Holy of Holies in the Temple in Jerusalem. This outraged the population and a rebellion erupted which had as its' bottom line the removal of the Romans from the land. Rome retaliated by laying siege to and eventually destroying the "golden city on the hill" - Mark uses this catastrophic event as a palette for him to draw the future of hope and joy which will come when the Lord returns. Mark calls his fellow "Christians" to be ever vigilant, for the timing of the "Kingdom coming" is known only to God and, like the bridesmaids in the gospel from a few weeks ago, warns and reminds his community to always have their lamps at the ready when, to quote Jesus in Matthew: "at midnight the cry rang out: 'Here is the Bridegroom - come and meet him' ... The maidens who were ready went into the banquet with him and the door was shut. Later, the other maidens came, the ones who

had not been prepared: 'Sir, sir' they said, 'open the door for us!'. But he replied, 'I do not know you'. Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day nor the hour."

So, Advent is a time for us to reflect on how "prepared" we are as individuals and as a community to be ready for whenever Jesus returns as he has promised he will. How will he know we are ready for him?

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION THIS WEEK:

1. While this may be a painful thing to do, think about some moment in your life when all you saw and felt was darkness. In honest reflection, where was God to you in the swirl of hurt and pain which threatened your life, your hope? If he seemed absent, where is God now for you? If things have changed, how did they change?
2. How will the Lord know that you are preparing his way in your life?
3. How will the Lord know that the faith community to which you belong is preparing the way of the Lord?
4. St. James, writing to the Church as it moved outwards from Jerusalem into the darkening world said, "Do not merely be hearers of the word; be doers of the same". If Jesus was to tap you on the shoulder today and ask if you have been preparing his way, how would you answer him?