

November 27, 2016  
1st Sunday Advent, Year A

### **Christ for others**

Advent is a time of waiting in hope and expectation. We may hope for many things: to win the lottery; get a better-paid job; pass an examination; find the right person to marry; overcome an illness; heal a soured relationship. Perhaps though the Church's celebration of Advent is more akin to the kind of excited joy in a child's heart awaiting a forthcoming birthday party. Or the joy of expectant parents awaiting the birth of their first child.

For the Church, Advent is the season that prepares us for the celebration of a birth and a birthday: Jesus Christ on the 'first Christmas'. However, this is not simply a celebration of an event that occurred some two thousand years ago. This first coming of Jesus Christ includes his birth, public life and ministry, his death and resurrection, as well as his continuing presence among us. This is what we celebrate in the Church's liturgy, especially the Eucharist; it is also at the heart of Christian mission which sees Christ present in every person, tribe, people and nation, as throughout the whole of creation.

Advent, then, is meant to awaken us to this reality that Jesus Christ was born in Bethlehem, grew up in Nazareth, ministered throughout Galilee and was crucified and rose from the dead in Jerusalem. He ascended to the Father and continues now as 'light of the world' in which we live today. In other words, this first coming of Jesus Christ is an ongoing event calling us ever and always to centre our lives on his teaching and example, and to recognise his living presence in our Church and world.

While all this is central to our Christian faith, we do well to think about what the Scriptures call the *second or final coming* of Jesus Christ. Today's readings reflect this emphasis on the return of Jesus Christ at the end of time when we are called to judgment. Remembering that "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow" (Hebrews 13:8), we need to read his role as judge of the living and the dead in relation to his central message of the "Kingdom of God" yet to come and already present among you. Equally central to this message is the call to repentance and the offer of salvation.

We are not called to live our lives in fear and dread. Of all people, Christians should be full of joyful expectation in the knowledge that the one who comes to judge is also the one whose love for us and offer of salvation are so poignantly expressed in the figure of Christ on Calvary. Christians are no longer so narrow-sighted to think only they will be 'saved'; rather they see their mission to the world to be Christ for others and to show that God's divine mercy and forgiveness are offered to all. Or, in the words of Pope Francis, "The mercy of God is the mission of the Church".

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