

First Sunday of Advent, 29 November 2020

Scriptures: Isaiah 63:16b-17, 19b; 64:2-7; 1 Corinthians 1:3-9;

Mark: 13:33-37

Homily: Fr. Ken

This weekend we begin the season of Advent and the new liturgical year. In Advent we are called to look back with gratitude as we just did at Thanksgiving, for all the good experiences of our lives, and to look forward with hope for what will still come in the future.

In looking back, we reflect on the miracle of God's visit to our planet Earth.

Born to Mary and Joseph, God has come to us not just in history, but in the very human person of our brother, Jesus Christ, as promised and foretold by the prophet Isaiah in our first reading from the Hebrew Scriptures.

Jesus, through his own words and actions, has established God's justice on Earth.

All who believe and are bound to God in love and hope, are also bound to one another. As such, we are to continue to increase in love for one another and for all people, as St. Paul reminds us in his letter to the Christian community in Corinth.

Our celebration of the fact that God has actually been here, is half of the meaning of Advent. The other half focuses our attention on what is generally known as "the second coming of Christ", that is, the end of the universe described in apocalyptic terms in the Gospel.

Although the language of the Gospel we heard is symbolic and quite picturesque, it does instill in us a sense of the suddenness of the end of time.

In the words of one scripture scholar: "When Christ appears with power and glory, the human experiment will end, illusion will give way to reality, the temporary will disappear before the permanent, and God will be seen as who God is".

We will have transcended both time and history. For our part, we wait for that moment to come. However, such vigilance certainly does not mean that we sit back and watch the cosmic horizons for some kind of signs, or that we withdraw from reality and pray that we keep ourselves unsullied by the world. No, certainly not.

Our annual celebration of Christmas celebrates God's desire to become immersed in the human experience. To do justice to this great gift, we are also to immerse ourselves in every aspect of the human condition. There we will find Christ.

Dorothy Day, whose sainthood is currently being advanced by the U.S. Catholic Bishops, recognized and welcomed Christ whom she saw in the needy, the hungry, the homeless, and the forgotten. Her eyes were made new by her religious faith, and her heart warmed by her sense of God's presence. Jesus' words about serving those in need were seared into her very soul. She was one of those rare individuals who can shine a new light on Gospel teachings and actually live according to the words and the example of Jesus himself.

Unfortunately, Dorothy Day's lived faith and commitment to Christ continues to remain something of a rarity. We hold her out as unique, and so she was.

But rather than simply admire her, we are to emulate her example. Dorothy was convinced that prayer was more than words. She was certain that prayer can be the witness of one's life, the work one does, the friendships one cultivates and the love one gives and receives from others. Through her prayer, she was able to recognize and serve Christ in his many comings among us.

When she died, just after Thanksgiving, on November 29<sup>th</sup>, in 1980, exactly forty years ago today, those in whom she had seen and served Jesus were gathered at the Church for her Funeral Mass. Beggars, day laborers, bag ladies, addicts, eccentrics, priests, nuns, and bishops, came together to pay their respects.

As we today celebrate the coming of Jesus, the example of this good Christian woman, Dorothy Day, and the spirit of the Advent season, invite us to take stock of ourselves.

And so, we conclude our reflection by asking: Are our eyes keen enough, our faith firm enough, our heart warm enough, to recognize the face of Jesus in all our sisters and brothers, and to faithfully serve those in need?