

2nd Sunday of Advent (A)

Is 11:1-10 / Mt 3:1-12

08.12.2013

In haste...

According to the liturgy of our Church, we could compare the Advent season to a marathon. Last week the opening prayer of our Eucharistic celebration encouraged us to “run forth to meet Christ”; the concluding prayer of the last Sunday before Christmas will exhort us to “press forward all the more eagerly” to the celebration of Christmas.

Today, according to the opening prayer of our celebration, we are – we should be – counted among those “who set out in haste to meet God’s Son”.

Are we really setting out in haste to meet the Lord?

The expression “in haste” is eminently biblical. We find it in many key moments of the New Testament: when Mary goes to meet with her cousin Elizabeth (Lk 1:39), when the shepherds receive the news of the birth of the Child and decide to go to see him (Lk 2:16), when Zacchaeus goes down from the tree to welcome Jesus (Lk 19:6).

Obviously the image here is not about the speed of our physical walk but about the driving force of our lives. The same Greek word which we translate by *in haste* is also translated in the New Testament by *with zeal*. St Paul exhorts the Romans using the same Greek verb: “Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord” (12:11). What is at stake here is the urgency of love, the ardour of our love for the Lord.

So today our opening prayer invites us to reflect on the pace of our inner journey, on the depth and the eagerness of our longing for the Lord. This is a very appropriate theme for our 2nd Sunday of Advent when our Church presents St John the Baptist to us as a model for our pilgrimage. According to Jesus, John “was a burning and shining lamp” (Jn 5:35). He was the precursor of the Lord, a passionate and ardent forerunner.

For our part, how and where are we running? We may run away from difficulties we do not want to deal with, we may run after self-gratification, money, power or sex. Our feet may be clogged up in a traumatic past event. We may simply shuffle along, reluctantly following the rules and conforming to the habits of our community. As Churches, do we not sometimes look like a group of passive tourists, who listen superficially to the guide and follow the lead without being really involved in the whole process?

More precisely for this Advent season, where are we running to? In what are we investing our energy? Is there still room for passion and fire in our faith journey?

At its core, the expression “setting out in haste to meet the Lord” speaks of passionate love for our Saviour, of deep desire for an encounter with our Beloved.

In our first reading the prophet Isaiah shared with us an amazing vision of peace and harmony, he set before us a hope for a creation reconciled and restored to its original dignity. This perspective should make us realise how much our Christian faith is animated by an incredible expectancy that cannot be quenched. Our faith should maintain and fan into a flame a perpetual longing within us for something which is deeper, broader, greater than “all we can ask or imagine” (Eph 3:20).

What are the great yearnings by which we are moved? If we are moved at all... Whether we feel good or whether we feel bad, we may choose to settle in our present situation, maintaining the status quo, and walking gingerly so that nobody rocks the boat.

I am aware that we cannot run all the time, we need to stop for rest. It would not be realistic to expect ourselves to be on fire always, ever full of enthusiasm and passion. There are times when our energy levels are low, when we are overburdened, when our body, our mind and our heart are tired. We do not have to feel guilty about this. We are not God. We are not even supermen or superwomen.

Sometimes it is important for us to recharge our battery by resting with the Lord. It is vital for us to take time regularly to reconnect with him in quiet prayer and with stimulating reading.

However the Advent season is an opportunity for the Church to alert us about the danger of just plodding along in our spiritual life. We are reminded that, according to St Paul, we are meant to be “straining forward to what lies ahead, pressing on towards the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus” (Ph 3:14).

The purpose of these weeks before Christmas is to rekindle the fire within us, to sow anew a burning expectancy within our hearts, to stretch us in hope and desire.

In the days to come, we are going to hear or to sing many Christmas carols. The ancient longing of Israel will be echoed in the repetition of the words: “O Come, O come”. How are we going to make ours these words? We may sing them and think: “Yes come... but not now!” or “Come... but please do not disturb!”

Do we really want the Lord to come?

St Bernard of Clairvaux wrote: “As long as I live the word ‘return’ will be on my lips (...). From the burning desire of my heart, I will not cease to call the Lord, begging him to return” (*On the Song... 74:II,7*).

In less than three weeks, we will celebrate Christmas. In the midst of all the hustle and bustle of the preparations, there is still time for the Spirit to reawaken a holy longing in our hearts, a vibrant eagerness for the coming of the Lord in our lives and in our world. As the author of the Letter to the Hebrews exhorts us: “Let us look to Jesus” and “let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us” (12:2.1).