

1st Sunday of Advent (C)  
(Jeremiah 33:14-16 / Luke 21:25-28. 34-36)  
28.11.2021

Let me propose that we enter into this Advent season under the sign of **growth**. I make that proposal inspired by the words of Sacred Scripture heard this morning: *In those days and at that time, I will make a virtuous Branch grow for David, who shall practice honesty and integrity in the land.* Through His prophet, Jeremiah, the Lord promises His people growth. Growth in integrity. Growth in confidence. Growth in blessing. Jeremiah speaks these words on behalf of Israel's loving and faithful God. Through the words of the prophet I hear the Lord making known to us that His will for each one of us – the desire of His heart for you and for me. It is the restoration of our broken lives. The Lord wants to make us whole. He wants to see us become integrated beings – men and women *made one again*: each one of us within our self and all of us with each other. The Lord wants to heal whatever is broken, whatever is fractured, within us. The prophet's words go on to assure us that we can entrust to our caring God everything that disturbs us; whatever weighs heavily upon our burdened minds and hearts. He is ready to accept us as we are: with our failures, our disappointments, our pain, our sorrow, our questions, our confusion. We can turn to the Lord in the sure and certain knowledge that is there, ready to comfort, us. We can be confident that the Lord is ready to recreate us by the grace of His forgiving life-restoring love. The Lord wants only our good. His deepest desire is to bless us. I wonder if we really believe what I am saying. I wonder if we dare to do as the psalmist bids us when he invites us to *trust and hope in the Lord*.

Advent is a great season of confident hope. It is a privileged time for us to await the fulfilment of the Lord's promises.

In today's Gospel passage we heard the great promise that we will be graced to *see the Son of Man coming in power and great might*. Jesus' words make it clear to us that we are not to fear the Lord's appearance. Instead, we are to long for it. Even when menacing things occur – things that might *cause men and women to die of fear*, as believers, we are called to *stand erect*; we are told to *hold our heads high, because our liberation is close at hand*. At the heart of the Lord's reassuring message heard this morning is the assurance that we shall be set free. Jesus' words make it clear to us that what God wants for us is that we live as free men and free women. He promises us liberation. Liberation from all that binds and ensnares us. To begin with, that will be those many deep-seated tendencies we allow to hold us captive; our addictions of all sorts, the compulsive behaviours and thought patterns that can grip us to the point that they cripple our whole existence. There are many things that can coarsen and harden our hearts. We heard Jesus' words: *Watch yourselves or your hearts will be coarsened by debauchery and drunkenness and the cares of life*.

Is it not true that we allow such a lot to invade our minds and hearts to the point where our peace is disturbed and our inner-self troubled? All that weighs upon us that we fail to attend to can detract even from our physical well-being. We are inclined to *worry and we fret over so many things that are not really necessary*. This can happen even when we consider the many things we are doing to make ourselves busy to be work for the Lord. Like Martha who became so agitated and disturbed in her kitchen, frantically occupying herself for Jesus (or so she thought!), we can be so caught up in the Lord's work that we forget the Lord of the work. In her agitation, Martha convinced herself that she should be engaged in the multiple chores she had created for herself. She thought she should be caught up in all the fuss... when, all the while, the Lord's desire for Martha was simply that she should be with Him. The Lord longed for Martha to be as wholeheartedly present to Him as her sister Mary was – Mary who sat at His feet and listened to His every word.

With Advent we enter into a time of the year when we can allow so much that doesn't really matter, so many things that aren't truly essential, to take over and preoccupy us. Our lives can be so preoccupied that there is no room at the inn for the One who comes hoping that we might welcome Him. The hype all around us can carry us away from where we should be within ourselves – quietly keeping vigil, watching and waiting for the Lord; attending to the Master – attuned to His life within us... ready to greet Him when He comes to manifest Himself to us in His characteristic manner: ,gently and discreetly, in the silence of our hearts.

Christ's coming to us, His revelation of Himself, is most often, as the hymn writer reminds us, *as gentle as silence*. If only we recognised that!

In light of what I have been saying, might I suggest that we try to create space – *sacred space* – for quiet contemplation during these Advent days? I suggest that we could all attempt to give time to silent waiting upon the Lord during this season of vigilance. This is something Jesus Himself did. We read in the Gospels how often *before daybreak Jesus would rise and go off to some isolated place where He could pray undisturbed*. The Synoptic Gospels especially present to their readers glimpses into such moments. They draw to our attention those periods Jesus spent alone, usually in the early morning. They also recount to us how it happened that Jesus sent the crowds away so that his disciples and co-workers might avail of quiet moments with Him. The disciples are shown to have been graced with time alone with Jesus in prayer. What the reader is led to grasp through these episodes is that such practice was a regular part of Jesus' own life and that it became part of the lives of those who gathered around Him to minister alongside Him. We might ask ourselves if such times are a regular part of our lives.

Silence and solitude are so very important for the Christian life, for our discipleship – along with prayer, fasting, alms-giving, scripture reading, reflection upon one's life, confession of one's sin, charitable service, generosity in one's whole way of being, drawing close to others in their need, giving to others, for their benefit, something of one's time and energy... All these things are so important for our spiritual development, but perhaps, over and above everything else, for our growth as persons, it is vital for us to be simply silent. (Remember, growth is the sign under which I have proposed that we live this Advent season.) I am sure and certain that if we were to give ourselves more to silence and solitude we would soon discover how beneficial this would prove to be for our **growth** as human beings made in God's image and likeness.

Silence and solitude are not just things to be turned on rare occasions. They are not just a kind of optional *pick me up*. Silence and solitude are not simply exercises to make us feel better when we find ourselves overwhelmed by the many demands life makes upon us. Silence and solitude are *vital* (literally *life-giving!*) at all times. We need to consciously build silence and solitude into our lives. It is good for us to tune into silence willingly and intentionally. It is beneficial to us to seek out solitude. It is a positive thing to carve into our busy schedules times in which we can simply be *alone* with God – so as to become *all one* with Him. Solitary communion with the One who is the ultimate source of our being. It will lead us to live a more integrated existence, helping each one of us become more integrated within our self; and thus enabled to become more integrated with others around us.

Silence and solitude are required if we are to hear the Word gently call out to us, inviting us to *come to be*, to *become*, whole, true, integral persons.

In silence before God we won't just nod off to sleep, for we will find ourselves challenged. We will find that the silence we practice may awaken deep longings within us, stirring movements

within our hearts that we might have preferred to ignore but which cry out for our attention and need to be attended to.

Making time just to pray, simply to be quiet, to listen and to rest, will also refresh and restore us.

If *obedience* comes from *listening*, silence is required for us to be able to hear properly.

Earlier I quoted the hymn *O the Love of My Lord is the Essence* – with its refrain which uses the phrase *as gentle as silence*. At this stage let me remind you of the lyrics of a more secular, but also deeply spiritual song, *The Whisper of Silence*. That song's lyrics speak of how *things are heard within the sound of silence*; how *our eyes are stroked*, *our lives are touched by the sound of silence*; how it is in *the wells of silence* that people are led to *bow and pray*, and, finally, through silence, we are led to discern *the whispered voice of prophecy* all around us.

Let me bring this reflection to a close by suggesting for this Advent season one little exercise which I believe is within the grasp of each and every one of us gathered here this morning. It is simply to halt for a short moment and become conscious of the Lord's presence to us; His presence within us. It is to take a few minutes each day in which we hear the Lord speak these words to us: *Be still and know that I am God*. I firmly believe that we were to do that for just a short moment (just a few minutes to begin with) each and every day, we would be led to feel the great benefit that stems from it. We would feel a sense of connection with the One who is the root and origin of our lives. It think after four weeks of Advent – just being attuned to God for those few minutes each and every day – we would be led to see that we have *grown* during this Advent season... *grown* to have become more and more the person the Lord our God always intended us to be: persons fully alive!

Amen!