

30th November 2025, Andrea Bianchi

Readings: Isaiah 2:1-5; Romans 13:11-end; Matthew 24:36-44

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be pleasing in your sight, LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer, Amen.

It is tempting to judge God. It is tempting to blame him for the sorrows we experience in our lives and for the evil we see around us. It is tempting to consider God as the culprit for what happens which we think should not have happened. We have an idea of what a perfect world should look like. God perhaps surprisingly also has an idea of what the world should look like and a desire for us. We read in Isaiah "they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks" (Isa 2:4).

So what is the problem with this outlook? Or what seems to be the problem? In our minds we probably think that either God is not able to solve our problems, or that he is not willing. So there is either a lack of skill or a lack of love and interest from God. Over the course of the centuries, almost since the beginning of Christianity, believers and sceptics, atheists and theologians have debated this question: why so much evil? The short answer is related to what I believe is a popular African saying: "A falling tree makes more noise than a growing forest."

The evil around us sometimes makes so much noise that it seems hard to acknowledge the plenteous beauty and abundant goodness in the world, even though the quantity of goodness is vastly superior than the evil there is. As Christians we are not only allowed but should look forward to the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth. We are allowed to imagine a world of perfect peace and harmony. A world, once again quoting Isaiah, where spears become pruning-hooks.

Now for another question is. Will such a world of peace and harmony ever exist on earth? Will we ever experience it? We believe that Jesus will return and put all things right. (Mt 24:33) But when? In the very early years of Christianity, after Jesus had left, leaving his apostles in charge, there was for some a sense in which the time when Jesus Christ would come in glory was near. For some early Christians at least, they were sure that they would see Jesus come back and return "with power and great glory" (Mt 24:30) in their own lifetime. We have a sense of this when we read in Paul "the night is far gone, the day is near" (Rm 13:12). Two thousand years later, we are still waiting for a second visit from Jesus, a visit that he himself had spoken of when departing from earth after his resurrection. (Mk 13:2). Don't we all affirm with one voice in the Nicene Creed "He will come again in his glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end"?

So, we know that good greatly surpasses evil in the world, and that Jesus will return to finally put all things right. In today's gospel, we are reminded of that visitation. We are reminded that Jesus will come again and restore everything. We are reminded that God knows the hour, knows the way, and that his plan is to restore us to harmony with him, with ourselves, with each other and the world around us. Evil will be finally destroyed and the world will be restored. God cares about us deeply, even though we don't understand sometimes his timing, his deep respect for our freedom. God is not fighting against the devil, he has won the battle since the beginning of time. It is just a matter of when. Despite all the sweetness of the baby Jesus, the candles, the stars, children's songs, this time of Advent leading into Christmas reminds us that we are waiting to celebrate Christmas but also that we are waiting for the return of Jesus in power and glory, to restore everything, to put everything under his feet.

In the gospel today we are urged to stay awake, because Jesus' return will be sudden. The gospel compares the return of Christ to a thief, coming at an unexpected hour in the night. Reading just a few lines further in the gospel, Jesus compares his return to the return of the bridegroom. It will be a sudden return, a return in joy for some, like in a wedding, and a return of judgment for others, as with a thief. In the gospel we read that two men will be in the field, one will be taken and one will be left, and that two women will be grinding meal together, one will be taken and one will be left. I often

thought that the one of the two being taken was the one whose destiny I don't want to share, but maybe it will be rather that the one of the two who will be taken who will be the one taken to stay close to God. Just before this passage we read that the angels of God will gather the Lord's chosen from the four winds, that is from all the earth. (Mt 24:31). The angels will gather all those who recognise God to be close to God, and those who recognise God are the ones that distribute food to the hungry, drink to the thirsty, clothing to the naked, caring for the sick and those in prison. This comes again just a few lines after what we have read in today's gospel (Mt 25:35-36) To be chosen to stay with God will be a matter of living for justice, living marked by caring for each other, living for love, in love.

The people at the time of Noah, as we read, were suddenly swept away by the flood. They were evil people who practiced injustice and iniquity, their only concern was for their own physical needs and they did only evil. (Gen 6:5). God chose to save Noah and his family to save the human race. In today's world, our basic needs are always the same, and there are so many people who need our help, especially at this cold time of the year, even if just with a donation to charitable organisations, if not with our actual help and time. But today our basic needs are also for ourselves, we sometimes live in isolation, we don't have anyone we feel we can be open to, we long for smiles and for the care of others, we can be addicted to all sorts of things. So, to stay awake for the second coming of Jesus, let us to start here – to start from basic needs, to try and be more kind, to smile one time more today, anything works, even the smallest things we can imagine, if done genuinely to support each other in faith.

I conclude this Advent Sunday sermon with a health warning: Jesus does not ask of us that we empty ourselves, that we live for others as if we did not exist, that we are only as good as we do things for others. Jesus has come for you, and you, and you, and loves and knows each one of us by name. The health warning is that in order to give, in order to practice justice, in order to love others, in order to be awake for the coming of Jesus, in order to keep Advent as a time of preparation for Christmas, we must also make space for our inner lives.

Unwittingly we have adapted ourselves to the commercial pressure making Advent a stressful time, suddenly there are so many things that are important leaving us, when Christmas arrives, worn out and stressed. And I know that those doing great work in the bazaar in the last week might be already in that state! So, in order to stay awake, we will need to take care of ourselves as well, by prayer, by silence, by all the many other things we enjoy. So let us take this other verse from the Gospel "Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest" (Mk 6:31) as our way of recharging our batteries this Advent, so that we may be able to better serve and love others and God, and so that we may stay awake for his second coming and keep a joyful Christmas. Amen.