

Advent

1 12 13

Almighty God,
give us grace to cast away the works of darkness
and to put on the armour of light,
now in the time of this mortal life
in which your Son Jesus Christ
came to us in great humility;
that on the last day
when he will come again in glorious majesty
to judge the living and the dead,
we may rise to the life immortal.

Our text today may be found in Matthew's gospel, chapter 24 and verse 44:

'the Son of Man is coming . . .'

What are you looking forward to ? What do you look back on ? One of the characteristics we share as human beings is our sense of the passage of time. We have a memory of time past and we have an anticipation of time to come. There are good times and bad times and our memories of the one help us to have a taste for the other.

Today is Advent Sunday and there are four Sundays between now and Christmas, a time to look forward and a time to look back. Our celebration of Christmas, our

celebration of the birth of Christ, is something we can look forward to at this time of year with the nights getting darker and longer and colder. We look forward to it because we have been there before and we can anticipate what is to come: presents, parties, good food, good drink, good company !

But Advent is not only a time to look forward to Christ's birth but it is also a time when we remember his Second Coming. The one is sweetly beautiful; the other spectacularly powerful !

So what is the Second Coming ? Let me be brief. It is an article of our faith which we will shortly reaffirm when, together at the end of this sermon, we again say the creed. The particular sentence in question is: 'He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.'

And there we have it. The Second Coming is the end times. It is the end of the world as we know it and the establishment of the Kingdom of God in all its fullness, the new Jerusalem where death shall be no more, where there shall be neither weeping nor mourning – a new, eternal age of gold.

It is a time of judgement. The parable of the sheep and the goats is a picture of separation; the parable of the talents a picture of the reward for the good and faithful servants; the parable of the wise and foolish virgins, a picture of those found wanting being left out in the cold. Hard fact is that if there is to be judgement then there is also the possibility that some of us can be condemned. But although I know that condemnation is possible – and I do accept what Paul

writes to the church at Rome that **'all of us have sinned and fallen short'** – I thank God that we are justified in the sight of God not by any merit on our part but by God's own grace and mercy and the sacrificial love of his Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ, our Lord. It is not so much what we do that is important but the spirit in which we do it and the love which informs it and the motivation that underpins it. The key question we should be asking ourselves is, 'Am I responding to the love of God by reflecting that love back to him and to my neighbour and to myself?' Here, it is our attitude and our respect that is essential and vital. God, I pray, will not reject us but we can reject him !

And lastly, when? Matthew's gospel today tells us clearly **'no one knows'** when. We've no idea: it could be any time but though we can't know when, we still need to be prepared no matter when, for the end can come when we least expect it! If you are an Adventist, then you will consider that we are now living in the end times and Christ is coming soon. If you are a pragmatist, you will acknowledge it's possible but take comfort in the fact that Christianity has been around for two thousand years already and we are still going strong. If you are an optimist, then you think that whatever, whenever, all will be well.

So let me end by saying that like Christmas, Christ's Second Coming is something to look forward to. Yes, it will be awesome. No, it won't be comfortable. But what I find comforting, truly exciting, is that it will ultimately be perfect: being in the presence of the one who loves us and being cherished by him. Not an end but a new beginning – perfection !

I have spoken in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,
Amen.

Preached at the Eucharist

St Bartholomew's, Dinard

1st December, 2013

G: Sermons 29 : Advent

