

## Advent

29 11 15

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 this morning may be found in Paul's First Letter to the Thessalonians, chapter 3 and verse 13: **'that you may be blameless before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.'**

What are you looking forward to? Having things to look forward to in the future is part of healthy living. We all have past memories that we can cherish. There is the joy of living in the present, of appreciating an actual moment in time as it happens. But there's also the excitement of anticipating a future treat: a birthday; a holiday; going somewhere special to do something special with someone special.

Well, today is Advent Sunday – the first Sunday of a new Christian year – Year C – when the gospel readings switch from Mark to Luke. Today is the start of Advent when we can look forward to Christmas, still about a month off even though the Christmas decorations and the tree are now firmly in place, here in the streets of Dinard. Today is the start of Advent when we can look forward to the Second Coming – the Day of Judgement – when Jesus will return as Christ the King, to judge the living and the dead and to establish the new order of peace and justice, a new Earth with a New Jerusalem where all will be well.

But the question I like to ask this morning is, 'Are you are we looking forward to such an apocalyptic event ?' On the Day of Judgement, can we stand with confidence in front of the Judgement Seat and expect to hear the great words of approbation from Jesus' lips – **'Well done good and faithful servant'** (Mt 25 v21)

The problem essentially is neatly expressed by Paul in his Letter to the Romans in chapter 3 and verse 23 where we may read the sad truth that **'all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God'**. True, but it is not our righteousness or lack of it but it is our heart, how we see things, how our way of making sense of things, the fruit of the grace of God which will determine how we're judged. My favourite parable is that of the Prodigal Son where the son is brought to his senses when he's forced to earn a living as a swineherd – a good Jewish lad looking after the pigs ! Coming to his sense he takes the long and difficult road home and there, where he is still far off, his father met him on the road and brought him home.

I was reading a book by Simon Wiesenthal called 'The Sunflower', a brief but difficult to read, an account of his experience in Nazi concentration camps during the Second World War. Simon Wiesenthal relates an encounter with a dying SS Soldier who speaks to him in what amounts to a death-bed confession. Karl, the young SS soldier, genuinely regrets his anti-Semitic behaviour and takes this last opportunity to express his real revulsion at his inhuman behaviour. The question Simon's book raises is is Karl truly forgiven ?

God knows but as Christians we can see it as an act of grace which allows someone genuinely to regret past wrong-doing. I'm minded of the great hymn by John Newton that was sung at the memorial service here last week for the shipwreck of the SS Hilda - 'Amazing Grace'. In the first verse, Newton, once a ship's captain in the slave trade, succinctly sums up the life-changing encounter with God's grace: 'Amazing grace ! How sweet the sound

that saved a wretch like me.

I once was lost but now am found;

was blind but now I see.'

Lost and found; blind and seeing, grace that will lead us home - strong stuff and so is the story of Karl that Simon Wiesenthal relates.

Being 'blameless' in the sight of God as is not a question of us never ever having done something wrong but rather our being 'blameless' is an act of God's grace, of God reaching out to us his children and wanting to bring us home. But we do have a choice and we don't have to say yes to God's grace. So let me end today by again asking the question - what are you looking forward to ?

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

*Preached at the Eucharist*

*St Bartholomew's, Dinard*

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G: Sermons 33 : Advent

