

## **BE PREPARED – 1<sup>ST</sup> SUNDAY ADVENT A**

Brian Gleeson CP

The story is told of three devils preparing to depart for Earth to begin their careers of deceiving people with their lies, tricks and spin. Before taking off, each has an interview with Satan, the chief devil. Says Satan to the first young apprentice: *'And how do you plan to deceive people and destroy them?'* He answers: *'I plan to convince them that there is no God.'* *'And what about you?'* says Satan to the second devil, *'how do you plan to deceive people?'* He answers: *'I plan to convince people that there is no hell.'* *'And what about you?'* says Satan to the third devil. He answers: *'My approach is going to be less intellectual. I simply plan to convince people that they have plenty of time, to prepare both for death and for the Second Coming of Jesus.'* Satan smiles at this and says: *'Do that, my son, and you will deceive many. Sure as hell they'll be sucked in by that!'*

As today we begin the First Sunday of Advent, the first Sunday of our new Church year, we note that there is much in common between this Sunday and New Year's Day on January 1st. Both focus on time and how we spend it. Today, then, let us focus on time in two ways: - how best to use the time left to us to prepare for our death, and how best to use the time remaining to prepare for the Second Coming of Jesus, when at the end of all time he will come back to repair, complete, and transform our world.

Both kinds of waiting involve the same kind of effort - the effort to be watchful and on the alert. This effort is mentioned in all three bible readings today. In our First Reading from Isaiah, we hear it put this way: *'O House of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the Lord.'* In the Second Reading Paul writes to the Romans: *'Brothers and Sisters! You know "the time" has come: you must wake up now ... let us give up all the things we prefer to do under cover of the dark; let us arm ourselves and appear in the light.'* In the gospel Jesus says to his followers: *'Stay awake, because ... [I am] coming at an hour you do not expect.'*

*'Walking in the light of the Lord'* includes longing for peace, praying for peace, and working for peace. Isaiah was writing about eight hundred years before Christ, when his people and their lands had been smashed around by the Assyrians. They were tempted to let their conqueror annex their country. But Isaiah tells them that this path is not the way to go: Put aside your plans

for a military solution, he advises, attach yourselves once again to God, and revive your trust in God. Have nothing at all to do with war. On the contrary, take the sure path to peace and prosperity. Hammer your swords into ploughshares and your spears into sickles, and turn the battlefields around you into the garden of God. Then, as a nation at peace, become a light of hope to all the peoples surrounding you.

What about us? In a world still marked by conflict, war, and terror, how can we live out God's vision of peace for the world? We will hammer our swords into ploughshares this Advent season by doing all of the following:

- removing violent words from our speech;
- not watching violent movies and television shows;
- encouraging children to avoid computer games involving destruction of life and property;
- being reconciled with anyone we've been fighting and with anyone from whom we've become estranged;
- praying for the wisdom to become peacemakers and reconcilers wherever we find anger, resentment, or hatred;
- praying for the healing and recovery of innocent civilians suffering from the sadness, grief, death and destruction from so much violence in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria and Egypt;
- giving our support to individuals and groups working for sincere and lasting reconciliation with our aboriginal brothers and sisters, and to those working for just outcomes for refugees and asylum-seekers.

Paul names drunkenness and sexual misbehaviour as things that happen *'under the cover of dark'*. What was happening in social life in Paul's time is still happening today. So, over the weeks leading up to Christmas, you and I may need to be on our guard against getting drawn into the madness, the excess, and the irresponsibility that too often go with workplace parties.

Jesus uses the image of a sudden, unexpected home invasion, to say that his *'second coming'* to earth at the end of time will be just as sudden and just as unexpected. Even though two thousand years have passed since he first taught this, his warning remains real and relevant. *'Stay awake,'* he says, *'get ready, be prepared, by being faithful to my teachings. I am definitely heading your way, even though you know neither the day nor the hour.'*

**Solid, sound advice surely from Jesus for meeting him, whenever and wherever he comes to take us home!**