

WAITING AND HOPING: 1ST SUNDAY ADVENT B

Brian Gleeson CP

A woman stands at the end of a pier. Her eyes scan the far horizon. She is waiting and longing for her husband's ship to reach port. A father climbs to a lookout on the top of a hill. He is hoping and longing to see his younger son come home to his family. A little girl puts out a glass of Coca Cola for Father Christmas, hoping that that he will leave her a doll. A young married couple is waiting and longing for the birth of their first child. An old man, sitting alone in a nursing home, has been waiting for three years for his only daughter to visit him. All of these people are waiting and hoping for their dreams to come true. But they are powerless to make them come true. All they can do is to wait and to keep on waiting.

Waiting, in fact, is a big part of our lives. *'I can't wait to see you,'* we say. Or someone says to us, *'I will wait for you,'* or *'wait over there, please'*, or more sharply, *'you wait your turn'*.

Hoping too is a big part of life. Waiting and hoping are closely related. If we are waiting, we are also hoping that what we are waiting for will really happen. *'I hope Mum gets well soon,'* we say. *'I hope I passed that exam.'* *'I hope it's nothing serious.'* *'I hope you have a nice time.'* *'I hope the wars in Iraq and Syria will end soon.'* *'I hope to see you soon.'* If we are hoping, we know too that if we don't or won't wait, our hopes may be dashed.

Today, the First Sunday of Advent, we begin New Year's Day in the Church. During the four weeks of Advent we notice that our church community puts strong emphasis on waiting and hoping, waiting and hoping for the coming of God into our lives, waiting and hoping for the presence and help of God within all the pain and darkness of life.

Once when Mother Teresa was visiting the USA she was asked which virtue Americans need the most. She was expected to say *'charity'*, but she answered that what they need most of all is hope. When quizzed about her answer, she said that too many people have lost hope. The same may be said more or less, surely, about ourselves.

But perhaps we haven't so much lost hope as misplaced it. Perhaps we have placed our hope on what cannot fulfil our deepest longings and needs. We have been told that if we just work hard, postpone some immediate gratifications, and wait patiently, then our dream will surely come true. The dream that promises us a beautiful house, a late model car, a wonderful paying job, a perfect partner in life and a perfect family! But perhaps far from being the great dream, this may become the big illusion.

Dreams motivate us to keep on hoping, but illusions are really false hopes that can end only in disappointment and frustration. To be spared living with illusions, our Advent readings today tell us to be watchful as well as waiting. But before we can be watchful, our readings also tell us, we must be wide awake. But if we find ourselves racing around frantically trying to get the most out of every minute, buying every labour-saving device on the market, talking nearly non-stop on our mobile phones, shopping for Christmas till we just about

drop, we might think that we are wide awake. But the Word of God today suggests that to be so busy that we ignore the presence of God in our lives and of the plans of God for us, we are actually asleep. Then, maybe, we are just living with illusions.

So the prophet Isaiah reminds us of our deep-down need to stop living life as though we are in complete control, and to let God take charge of our lives. By letting God mould us and shape us! He is speaking for you and for me in all our busyness when he says to God: *'Lord, you are our Father; we the clay, you the potter, we are all the work of your hand.'*

What a wonderful prayer to keep saying to God in Advent! What a wonderful thought to keep us peaceful and focussed on the true meaning of Advent – waiting and hoping for the coming of Christ into our lives! As at Bethlehem, at the end of time, and in the here and now! Let's hear and say it once again: *'Lord, you are our Father; we the clay, you the potter, we are all the work of your hand.'*

The message of our readings is very clear and very relevant: - *'stay awake'*, and *'watch out'*. Why? Lest the spirit of Advent and Christmas, the spirit of goodwill to all, the spirit of joy, peace and calmness, the spirit of generosity and love, the very spirit of prayer, be snuffed out of our hearts and lives by the false spirits of consumerism and materialism.

Those two demons are never far away. Always waiting to pounce on our consciousness and invade our choices.

Everything I've been stressing is summed up in that marvellous ending to that prayer we pray in every Eucharist for deliverance from evil of every kind: *'... we wait in joyful hope for the coming of our Saviour, Jesus Christ'*. Let's pray it with special emphasis and fervour today!

bgleesoncp@gmail.com