First Sunday of Advent (B)

Gospel text (*Mk* 13:33-37): Jesus said to his disciples: “Be watchful! Be alert! You do not know when the time will come. It is like a man traveling abroad. He leaves home and places his servants in charge, each with his own work, and orders the gatekeeper to be on the watch. Watch, therefore; you do not know when the lord of the house is coming, whether in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or in the morning. May he not come suddenly and find you sleeping. What I say to you, I say to all: ‘Watch!’”

“I say to all: ‘Watch!’”

Mons. José Ángel SAIZ Meneses, Archbishop of Seville
(Sevilla, Spain)

Today the universal Church begins a new Liturgical Year with the first Sunday of Advent. This is a time of hope —a time in which the memory of the first coming of the Lord is renewed in our hearts, in humility and concealment— and the longing for the return of Christ in glory and majesty is renewed.

This Sunday of Advent is also deeply marked by a call to vigilance. Thus, Saint Mark includes in Jesus' words the command to "watch" three times. The third time, he does so with a certain solemnity: "What I say to you, I say to all: ‘Watch!’” (Mk 13:37). It's not just an ascetic recommendation, but a call to live as children of light and of the day.

This call is addressed not only to his disciples but to all men and women of goodwill, as an exhortation reminding us that life does not have only an earthly dimension, but is projected towards eternal life beyond this world. The human being, who is created in the image and likeness of God, is endowed with freedom and responsibility, and has the capacity to love. Accordingly, we will have to account for our lives —how we have developed and used the abilities and talents received from God; whether we have selfishly guarded them, or whether we have made them fruitful for the glory of God and the service of others.

The fundamental disposition we must live and the virtue we must exercise is hope. Advent is the time of hope par excellence, and the entire Church is called to live in hope and to become a sign of hope for the world. We prepare to commemorate Christmas, the beginning of Christ’s coming: the Incarnation, the Nativity, his passage through the earth. But Jesus has never left us; he remains with us in various ways until the end of time. For this reason, "with Christ joy is constantly born anew" (Pope Francis).

Thoughts on Today's Gospel

- “Beloved, now is the acceptable time spoken of by the Spirit, the day of peace, salvation and reconciliation.” (St Charles Borromeo)

- “The hope of Christians is turned to the future but remains firmly rooted in an event of the past and guide us in the present.” (Benedict XVI)

- “When the Church celebrates the liturgy of Advent each year, she makes present this ancient expectancy of the Messiah, for by sharing in the long preparation for the Saviour's first coming, the faithful renew their ardent desire for his second coming. By celebrating the precursor's birth and martyrdom, the Church unites herself to his desire: ‘He must increase, but I must decrease’ (Jn 3:30).”» (Catechism Of The Catholic Church, Nº 524)

Other comments

“Be watchful! Be alert! You do not know when the time will come"

Fr. Antoni CAROL i Hostench
(Sant Cugat del Vallès, Barcelona, Spain)

Today, in this first Sunday of Advent, the Church begins a new liturgic year. We are, therefore, entering some very especial days of foretaste, renewal and readying.

Jesus warns us that "You do not know when the time will come" (Mk 13:33). Yes, in our life there will be a decisive moment. But, when will it be? We do not know. The Lord did not even want to reveal us when the time would come for the end of the world.

So, all this takes us towards an attitude of exasperation and conscientiousness: "May he not come suddenly and find you sleeping" (Mk 13:36). Time in this life is time of deliverance, of maturing our capacity to love; it is not a time of diversion. It is a time of “betrothal”, of preparation for our “wedding” time in afterlife, in communion with God and all the saints.

Yet, life is but a constant starting and restarting. The fact remains that we have to go through some definitive moments: perhaps, every day, every hour and every minute may become a crucial moment. Many or a few, but —in short— days, hours and minutes: it is here, on a concrete time, when the Lord is waiting for us. «In our life, in the life of Christians, our first conversion —that unique moment which each of us remembers, when we clearly understood everything the Lord was asking of us— is certainly very significant. But the later conversions are even more important, and they are increasingly demanding» (St.

Josemaria).

In this liturgical time we are to get ready for the great “advent”: the coming of Our Master. “Christmas”, “Nativitas”: it would be great if each day of our existence could be a “nativity” to a life of love! Perhaps, making of our life a permanent “Nativity” might be the best way to stay awake. Saint Mary, Our Mother, watch over us!