First Sunday of Advent (C)

Gospel text (*Lk* 21:25-28.34-36): Jesus said, “There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on earth nations will be in dismay, perplexed by the roaring of the sea and the waves. People will die of fright in anticipation of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. But when these signs begin to happen, stand erect and raise your heads because your redemption is at hand.”

“Beware that your hearts do not become drowsy from carousing and drunkenness and the anxieties of daily life, and that day catch you by surprise like a trap. For that day will assault everyone who lives on the face of the earth. Be vigilant at all times and pray that you have the strength to escape the tribulations that are imminent and to stand before the Son of Man.”

“Pray that you have the strength (…) to stand before the Son of Man.”

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

Today, as we start a new liturgical year, we renew our zeal and our personal struggle with our sights set on sanctity, ours and that of everybody else. The Church itself calls on us to do so, reminding us in today's Gospel, of the need to be always at the ready, always “in love with” our Lord: “Beware that your hearts do not become drowsy from carousing and drunkenness and the anxieties of daily life, and that day catch you by surprise…” (Lk 21:34).

We mustn't overlook a very important detail for those who are in love: this attitude of being alert —of being ready— cannot be intermittent, but has to become a permanent way of life. This is why, our Lord says to us: “Be vigilant at all times and pray…” (Lk 21:36). At all times! this is the right measure of love. Fidelity is not made on the basis of “sometimes yes, sometimes no”. It is, therefore, very important that the pace of our pious and spiritual formation be regular (day by day and week by week). If only we could live every day of our life with a new “first time” mentality; if only, every morning —when waking up— we would manage to say: —Today, I'm born again (thanks be to God!); today, I'm Christened again; today, I'm making my First Communion again; today, I'm getting married again... To persevere cheerfully, one has to “restart all over again”, to renew oneself.

In this life we're not here forever. There will come a day when “the powers of the heavens will be shaken” (Lk 21:26). Good reason to be alert! But, in Advent, the Church gives us a lovely basis for joyous preparation: certainly, one day men “will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.” (Lk 21:27), but meanwhile, God arrives on Earth meekly and with discretion; as a new-born child, to the point that “Christ could be seen, wrapped in swaddling clothes, in a feeding trough” (Saint Cyril of Jerusalem). Only an alert spirit could discover in this Infant the magnitude of God's love and salvation (cf. Ps 84:8).

Thoughts on Today's Gospel

- “We do not preach only one coming of Christ, but a second as well. The first coming was marked by patience; the second will bring the crown of a divine kingdom” (St. Cyril of Jerusalem)

- “Advent is a time when we strive to open our hearts to receive the Saviour, who alone is just and the sole Judge able to give to each his or her due. The salvation of God which we await is also flavoured with Love” (Francis)

- “The coming of God's Son to earth is an event of such immensity that God willed to prepare for it over centuries. He makes everything converge on Christ: all the rituals and sacrifices, figures and symbols of the `First Covenant’ (Heb 9:15)” (Catechism Of The Catholic Church, Nº 522)