

WHY ADVENT?

Longing for different life

Is 63:16b-17, 19b; 64:2-7

You, LORD, are our father, our redeemer you are named forever. Why do you let us wander, O LORD, from your ways, and harden our hearts so that we fear you not? Return for the sake of your servants, the tribes of your heritage.

Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down, with the mountains quaking before you, while you wrought awesome deeds we could not hope for, such as they had not heard of from of old.

No ear has ever heard, no eye ever seen, any God but you doing such deeds for those who wait for him. Would that you might meet us doing right, that we were mindful of you in our ways!

Behold, you are angry, and we are sinful; all of us have become like unclean people, all our good deeds are like polluted rags; we have all withered like leaves, and our guilt carries us away like the wind.

There is none who calls upon your name, who rouses himself to cling to you; for you have hidden your face from us and have delivered us up to our guilt.

Yet, O LORD, you are our father; we are the clay and you the potter: we are all the work of your hands.



“O come, O come, Emmanuel, and ransom captive Israel - we are Israel today that mourns in lonely exile here, until the Son of God appear” (an Advent song). This Sunday we are beginning the season of Advent, four weeks of repentant preparation for Christmas. What is it all about?

Longing for the Messiah

The bible contains the stories of people sitting in darkness and the shadow of death, going to an exile, living in bondage and falsehood, experiencing injustice and violence. Those people long for light. They want to return home, be free, walk in truth, and experience justice and peace. They centre their hope on God. He will send His anointed one to bring them from death to life.

The purpose of Advent is to relive that longing and hope, to bring the past into the present. The world has changed a lot and yet it has not changed much. Darkness, exile, bondage, falsehood, injustice, violence, and death continue to plague the lives of God's holy people. We long for Isaiah's ideal king, who will establish a new world without violence (Is 11:1-10). Like the people of Israel, we want to return from our exiles (Is 40:1-11). We call on God to come down from heaven and transform our lives and this world into His kingdom (Is

64:1-9). “O come, O come, Emmanuel, and ransom captive Israel”. We are the “captive Israel” today and we long to meet the “Emmanuel”, whose presence proclaims that we are not alone, that God is with us.

On the last Sunday of Advent we will meet Mary, a young girl from Nazareth. Her “fiat” has begun the process of transformation. The head of the serpent is about to be crushed (Gen 3:15). In Mary, the longing becomes pregnancy and a new life is waiting to be born. The dawn is coming. Our exile is about to end.

Repentance

Repentance means change but the essence of this change is a process of transformation from the worst to the best. It is a return from exile to a place of God’s presence. Tired of living far away from God, we decide to come back to Him. Tricked by the false promises of this world, we leave behind the old and go to embrace the new.

The Greek word for “repent” means “go beyond the mind you have”. After worshiping the infant Jesus, the Magi went back home by another road (Matt 2:12). After seeing the infant Jesus, the shepherds went back home rejoicing (Lk 2:20). Another road means another life in which only Jesus is worthy of your worship. “Go beyond” what the world can offer and embrace what only God can offer. Upon seeing the King of kings and Lord of lords, you cannot but sing and praise the Lord. Luke has two Advent songs in his Gospel, the one of Zechariah (Lk 1:67-79) and the one of Mary (Lk 1:46-55). In both songs, God is praised for the fulfilment of His promise. “Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people” (Lk 1:68), “He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever” (Lk 1:54-55).

Repentance leads to new life and rejoicing. Now we walk in light and the shadow of everlasting life. Nothing can daunt us because the joy of the Lord fills our hearts.

Conclusion

Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down, with the mountains quaking before you, while you wrought awesome deeds we could not hope for, such as they had not heard of from of old. No ear has ever heard, no eye ever seen, any God but you doing such deeds for those who wait for him”. (Is 64:1-3-4).

In such a way, the prophet prays today. How about us? Are we satisfied with our lives? What is the content of our hope? What is that we pray for? The time for change has come. Darkness and death do not have the last word. The last word belongs to light and life. Amen.

May God bless all who remember us in prayer and support our ministry.