

Advent 1C22

Donnybrook / Pro-Cathedral

Welcome

Today is the first Sunday of a new church year and it marks several beginnings.

Topic

We begin the countdown to Christmas; we start reading from the Gospel of Luke; we are invited to recognise again the longings of the heart. We are embarking on the synodal pathways. Each of these is important.

Steps

The word advent simply means arrival or coming and in this season we undertake a journey towards Christmas, the birth of Jesus. This happens every year but every year it is different because we are different. You may like to cast your mind over the past year – what were the gains and what were the losses. The pandemic, the unsettling of democracy and the climate crisis are in all our minds. A good question to ask would be how am I – simply as a human being, as a family member, as someone in society as large, and also as a believer.

For the next year or so, we will be hearing from the Gospel of Luke, a beautiful and rich presentation of the Jesus story. If we did a *vox pop* in the church right now, my bet is that the best remembered Gospel stories are from Luke – he alone has the Annunciation, the shepherds at Christmas, the Good Samaritan and the Prodigal Son, Zacchaeus and the Good thief, the disciples on the road to Emmaus. If this Gospel had somehow not survived, we would be missing a rich inspiration for Christian imagination and living and encouragement.

Luke presents a joyful picture of Jesus, spirit-driven, focussed on the compassion of God. Like Matthew, Luke is a second, expanded edition of Mark. The editorial adjustments can be revealing. Today's Gospel, for example, is substantially taken from Mark 13 – with a few additions which shed light. First of all, he takes some of the "fright" out of Mark by adding the encouraging words:

"When these things begin to take place, stand erect, hold your heads high, because your liberation is near at hand."

He also adds the warning against sleep-walking through life.

"Watch yourselves, or your hearts will be coarsened with debauchery and drunkenness and the cares of life."

Like a good pastor, he affirms and he encourages. Nowadays, we live with a fairly high level of stress – the cares of life – and Luke invites us to go deeper for our source of inner peace and personal resilience.

In fact, Luke is a great teacher of spirituality. If someone were to say to me, where would I find in the New Testament, the best teaching on prayer, I would unhesitatingly say the Gospel of Luke, the letters of Paul and the Gospel of John. It is no accident that these writers are especially rich on the Holy Spirit, joy and the spiritual journey, a kind of holy triad. The current experience of the pandemic has raised questions for us all – including questions personal resilience, wisdom and spirituality. If you've never read the Gospel of Luke from beginning end, what not set that as an Advent project for yourself?

Not least, this coming year as a community of faith, we will embark upon the synodal pathway, a vast consultation of the entire membership of the Catholic world, a huge venture, an adventure never undertaken before. The question before us is a good one: What is God asking of his church at this moment in our shared history? In a word, how can we as a community of faith offer the word of life, the Gospel, in our time? And accordingly, how should we be so we can serve that greater vision?

Conclusion

So, not just the first Sunday of Advent, business as usual! Instead, we have before us an occasion of grace, an opportunity for new life, both personally and as a community of faith. Let's all pray that we truly listen together to what the Spirit is saying to the churches.