

Reflection for First Sunday of Advent

Readings: Isaiah 2:1-5; Psalm 121(122):1-2,4-5,6-9; Romans 13:11-14; Matthew 24:37-44

For me, the First Sunday of Advent marks the moment where I really begin thinking of Christmas. It makes me think of the gifts I will have to buy and the need to decorate the tree, a task I don't find the most enjoyable! It also reminds me to focus on the real reason for the Christmas celebrations; the beautiful story of Jesus's birth in a stable in Bethlehem.

However, our readings this week remind us that the Advent season is not just about preparing ourselves for the powerful celebration of the incarnation, but for preparing ourselves for the second coming of Christ.

We are reminded to make ourselves ready, told to 'stay awake, because you do not know the day when your master is coming.' (Matthew 24:37), with Jesus making a perhaps alarming comparison of his return to a burglar coming in the night. Indeed, this thought may not be one which immediately fills us with hope.

Both Isaiah in his prophecy and David in his Psalm present images more likely to elicit expectant hope when they point to what this coming of the new Kingdom will mean. Both speak to a moment of rejoicing, praise, peace and light. This is a more appealing image for us to prepare ourselves for, but one that may seem completely foreign when we look to the world around us.

My slight dread when thinking of the image of the burglar in the night may point to the occasional fragility of my own hope. It is sometimes true when I consider some of the situations our friends at JRS face, especially when our friends who have been subjected to indefinite detention talk of their experiences of isolation and uncertainty; I can't help but feel that any prospect of hopefulness would be extinguished were I in their place.

On a recent trip to Harmondsworth IRC with volunteers from our Detention Outreach team, I sat listening to one of our friends in detention talk about his situation: the worries of his unresolved case, the separation from his family, his frustration with the system he was navigating and the fear that he may be removed from the country. He said his head felt sore with it all. In the course of the conversation with our volunteer you could sense his mood change a little and he even managed to crack a smile. As he was about to go my colleague said 'There's always hope!' He smiled, nodded in agreement and replied 'There is always hope'.

It's moments like these, the clear examples of the durability of hope and the power of people to bring hope to one another, that make me more expectant and hopeful for the second coming we are told to prepare for during this Advent season.

Let us not give in to hopelessness when met with darkness in the world around us, but learn to walk in the light of the Lord.

Nicholas Hanrahan