Lectio Divina – First Sunday of Advent Year B

Contexts

Mark's Gospel

- Composed between 65-70 CE
- Generally accepted as the first Gospel written.
- Authorship is unclear but possibly written by John Mark, the companion of Peter in Rome.
- Begins with the ministry of John the Baptist in the wilderness, then the Baptism of Jesus, then Jesus battling the forces of evil in the wilderness.
- First action of Jesus is to establish a community to establish the kingdom of God.
- Major work of this community is the work of healing and restoring God's right order, as opposed to the order of Rome, or the order established by the scribes and Pharisees, or religious and cultural norms of the time.
- Cleansing & healing stories restore people to their proper (rightful) place in the Kingdom and in human society (no longer outcasts, despised, unclean, etc).
- The right order of God's kingdom shatters and goes beyond the human and religious limitations placed on some of God's beloved sons and daughters.
- There is a characteristic starkness in Mark's Gospel – it is the shortest of the 4 canonical Gospels.
- Often the story is told by contrast – who is truly blind: the *blind* beggar or the *seeing* disciples, etc.

Mark 13:33-37 – things to notice

- This Sunday's Gospel is an excerpt from the longer exhortation to confidence and vigilance in Mark which precedes the passion of Jesus.
- This passage has a similar tone to the 3 parables on the last 3 Sundays of Year A which were about how the disciples waits in this 'in between' time (between the first and final coming of Jesus): alert, watchful, attentive, busy with the work of the Kingdom (deeds of loving kindness).
- '…because you never know when the time will come.' – The day of the Lord, the return of Jesus.
- 'he has gone from home, and left his servants in charge, each with his own task' – the servants are the disciples (community of believers) who are not to wait in idleness but attend to the tasks given them.
- 'and he has told the doorkeeper to stay awake'. Underlines the idea of a servants remaining at his task – not falling asleep on the job!
- 'So stay awake' for he might come at any time (evening, midnight, cockcrow, dawn) and he must not find you asleep (on the job).
- 'Stay awake!' – the fourth time this phrase occurs in the text. Repetition is a way of drawing attention to and underlining an idea in Scripture. I notice various politicians now use this technique in interviews.

The Liturgical Context – why does the church choose this passage to reflect on this Sunday? The first reading is from Isaiah and is a prayer addressed to God as 'our Father' and 'our Redeemer'. It is a prayer of a people who feel abandoned by God; who plead for him to return to them; who beg forgiveness and trust in mercy. At the end of the day, God is our Father, he is the potter, we are the clay, the work of his hands.

Reflection

This week's Gospel calls us to 'Stay awake', to be vigilant and attentive so that we do not miss the moment when God breaks into human history once again. The God who came among us is still among us. In Advent we train our eyes to see the reign of God more clearly so that we may be totally caught up in God's action in the world.

We live in the 'in between' time – between the first and final comings of Jesus. This excerpt from the Gospel urges us to stay awake, alert, watchful and ready not only for the 'day of the Lord's coming' at the end of time, but also for when the presence of God breaks in our lives and our world.

The Season of Advent – some notes

Advent is:

- A season of preparation for Christmas
- Not a penitential season like Lent
- Has two parts: the first two Sundays focus on preparing for Jesus' return at the end of time. The second two Sundays focus on preparing to celebrate Jesus' birth.
- The colour purple: represents hope, expectation and healing. It is also one of the 'royal' colours for we are preparing to welcome our King, the "sun of justice" who "will shine out with healing in its rays". (Mal 4:2)

The Gospels of the Sundays in Advent have four great movements:

1. Stay Awake!
2. Prepare!
3. Rejoice!
4. Receive!

Advent is a journey from:

Maranatha! Come, Lord Jesus!
to
Emmanuel. God-is-with-us!

The Advent Questions:
The Church uses both comings of Jesus to focus our attention on the here and now. How are we preparing, not only for the eventual return of Jesus but for the many ways in which he comes into our lives now? How are we living in this 'in between' time? In what ways are we 'giving birth' to Jesus by who we are, what we say, what we do?