

2nd Sunday of Advent (C)
(Baruch 5:1-9 / Luke 3:1-6)
06.12.2015
God's Glory

During this Advent Season the Church calls upon the Lord asking him to come again, to be present anew in our midst and to be at work within us as our Saviour. The weeks before Christmas are not just to prepare the crib, the tree and the meals for the celebrations of the festive season but to prepare us to welcome the One who brings light into the dark corners of our lives and gives peace to our hearts.

So we sing and say: "Come Lord Jesus, come!"

But there are a series of questions which should inevitably arise in our minds: who are we inviting to come? What do we really mean when we ask the Lord to come? Do we expect a great fixer, a nice and unchallenging baby, a distant bearded figure whose mission is to judge, punish or reward, preferably punishing others and rewarding us? Do we long for an inoffensive prophet whom we will use as a flag to gather our tribe together or as a back-up for our political or moral decisions?

Whatever we may expect, there is no doubt that the Lord is coming and yet the challenge is that we will discern and recognise only what we want to see. That was the problem of the Pharisees in Jesus' time. They had very precise ideas about the Messiah, how he should appear, what he should do and the way he should do it, they were expecting a Messiah who would fit with their expectations. Conclusion: they were unable to recognise him when he came in a different way.

In our first reading, the prophet Baruch gives us a glimpse of what is to come. To the believers living in the Diaspora, suffering exile far from their native land, Jerusalem being destroyed, the prophet addresses a message of consolation and the promise of a restoration.

The promise is about the gift of God's glory. Out of 9 verses, the word *glory* is repeated 6 times. Jerusalem is invited to "put the diadem of the glory of the Eternal" on her head. Israel will be "carried back in glory", walking "in safety under the glory of God", guided "by the light of his glory".

What does this mean for us today, particularly for those who experience exile? Exile not only from their geographical roots but all those among us who are exiled from their very selves, those who have the painful feeling of being disconnected from their lives and without solid and meaningful ground on which to stand?

In our common language, the word *glory* speaks of fame and glow, of appearance and visual impact. In the Bible, the word has a deeper meaning, it does not designate so much the renown as the real value. The expression "the glory of the Lord" means God himself, insofar as he reveals himself in majesty and holiness.

So the promise made by Baruch is about the gift of God himself. To assure us that we will be carried in glory means that we will be carried by God; to be assured that we will walk in the glory of God and by the light of his glory means that we will walk with God and by his light.

This promise is accomplished in Jesus Christ in whom the glory of God is entirely present. He is "the reflection of God's glory" (He 1:3). St Paul calls him "the Lord of glory" (1Co 2:8).

In Jesus Christ, God is fully, completely present to each one of us. Not only he is with us but he is also within us, because we have become his temple, the place where his glory abides.

Our Advent journey consists in preparing ourselves not only for the contemplation of the glory of God in the child Jesus, but it also consists in the training of our eyes so that we may discern the glory of God in ourselves and in others. As St Paul reminds us: “Seeing the glory of God as though reflected in a mirror, we are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another” (2Co 3:18).

It seems to me that here lies a great challenge for us: to really believe that God’s glory may dwell in us and in others, shine through us and through others.

At the moment, our societies feel threatened by terrorist attacks, our Churches struggle to find a way to proclaim the Good News in a relevant way, and many among us are assailed by doubts about the meaning of their lives and their personal value. Great is the temptation for all to allow fear and mistrust to lead us on the path of war and of heightened and obsessive self-protection.

Indeed we need to be able to live in security and yet the survival of our race depends on our choosing life rather than death and love rather than self-preservation.

If we build walls, we will not be able to see the glory of God in others. When hatred and violence disfigure a human being, as Christians we must all the more reflect God’s glory and allow it to shine through everything we do and say. Because we claim to be Christians, we cannot be satisfied with words and attitudes which demonise or alienate any man, any woman, any child of God, for all are recipients of God’s glory.

In the desert, because the people were afraid, because they felt lost and threatened, we are told that they “exchanged their glory for the image of a grass-eating bull” (Ps 106:20 NJB). We have to be careful not to exchange our glory, God himself, for other idols. It is not because we are afraid and feel threatened that we have to forget our dignity and prevent God’s glory from shining through us.

May we not be defined by our fears but by the abiding flame of God’s glory in our hearts. Our strength and our hope are in the presence of the Lord and in the glory of his might (cf. 2Th 1:9).

Come Lord Jesus, come!