

1st Sunday of Advent (A)
(Isaiah 2:1-5 / Matthew 24:37-44)
27.11.2016

Both readings heard on this First Sunday of Advent announce *The Day of the Lord*. Our two Scripture texts speak of the Lord's coming in contrasting ways.

The gospel puts us on our guard. It calls upon us to stand ready for fear that some terrible ill befall us, because of our negligence, our failure to pay heed to the Lord's command to stay vigilant.

In contrast, our first reading, from the prophet Isaiah, speaks of *the day of the Lord* in much more consoling terms.

It is as if we have a vision of terror on one hand – at the very least a need to be extremely alert, while, on the other hand, we have a vision of peace.

What is common to both of today's Scripture readings is that they speak of the Lord revealing Himself to His people in time. He is depicted as coming in times of darkness with light.

Both Scripture passages point to a new dawn appearing. They speak of an end of one way of being – shrouded in the darkness of night – and the beginning of another way of being, which will see us live in the light of the new day inaugurated by the Living God.

With this Advent Sunday, I believe we are invited to recognise our own shadow side: that on-going struggle with darkness which is part of all our lives. I believe we are being called to face up to darkness' hold upon us, not in order to allow ourselves to be held in its grip, but precisely so that its hold upon us may be broken.

The call addressed to us is to leave the darkness behind us, to throw it off, so that we may walk in the light of day.

We cast darkness aside by welcoming the gift of the Lord's own light which is offered to us with the dawn of each new day. The Lord's light carries healing in its rays. According to Isaiah's vision, it is the source of peace and well-being.

Without in any way denying the invitation to attention and the call to order which resounds in the gospel passage read this morning, I suggest that we concentrate our attention especially upon Isaiah's vision of peace, so that we may savour a foretaste of this grace in our lives today.

Isaiah's vision makes it clear that our coming to know peace depends upon our daring to live in the light.

That means daring to admit to the fact that there are sombre recesses in all our hearts, shadow sides to our lives, which are hidden from view – not only from other people's view, but frequently our own as well.

There are regions of darkness within us to which we are blind or which we prefer to deny. We may given glimpses of them, but we prefer to ignore that they are there.

We can foolishly imagine that we are *all truth and light* when, in fact, we are somewhat shrouded in deceit and darkness. Our lives are frequently overcast; at the very least, there are many grey areas within all of us.

Self-deception, delusion can lead us to fail to admit to this.

Addictions, compulsions, dependencies, sinful attractions of all sorts can have such a hold upon us and yet we can be oblivious to the fact that we are held captive by them.

So easily we justify ourselves when our way of being is clearly not properly adjusted and our

behaviours are frankly not justifiable.

The prophet Isaiah speaks to us of the necessity of looking at our lives in truth and honesty, guided by God's Word which reveals His will to us.

The message God spoke through Isaiah called upon Judah to submit to the Lord's teaching. Pope Francis shows us how this is done each and every day in the little thought-provoking, profoundly challenging, homilies he preaches in the *Casa Santa Marta*. (The news bulletin broadcast on the worldwide web by *Rome Reports* brings us poignant extracts from those homilies practically every day. They are worth accessing.)

The pope's morning homilies show us how to continually assess our lives in the light of God's word, bringing it to bear upon the concrete reality of our lives. They illustrate for us how to tune into the Scriptures each day to discern how best to situate ourselves and how best to act in the ordinary circumstances of our lives.

Pope Francis' daily meditations cut to the chase and go to the very heart of the matter. How radically he challenges that tendency/temptation of Church people – ourselves included – to want to gloss over things and justify their actions or inactions, as the case may be.

The Bible itself is clear in this respect. It continually tells us that we must flee from all forms of self-justification, while relying on God's grace to make all of us right with God, established in proper relationships with others and properly situated, each one of us, within our self.

As St Benedict reminds us in what he calls his *little Rule for beginners*, what each one of us is called to is an honest life. We must be engaged to walk in that direction. Our whole desire and effort should be oriented towards living what St Benedict calls *the beginnings of an honest way of life*.

In honesty of heart we find peace. Our experience shows us this, does it not?

When we face up to the reality of our lives truthfully we find that God accords us the grace of peace of mind and heart. We know great release from all that binds us and with that release comes a blessing of relief – and, even more than that, fullness of life in true freedom of heart.

Amen!