



Instituto Id de Cristo Redentor
Misioneras y Misioneros Identes
Presidencia

Rome, November 27th, 2022.
First Sunday of Advent.

REFLECTION

Isaiah 2:1-5; Romans 13:11-14; Mt 24:37-44.

Wake up and walk!



On this first Sunday of Advent, we begin a new liturgical year. The proper attitude is given to us by St. Paul in today's Second Reading: "*You know what time it is, it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep, for salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers.*"

Advent is, first, meant to be ***a time of spiritual reawakening***, a time of spiritual rebirth, as we return to what should be the proper foundation of our life — Christ himself — and build our life on him.

It is, also, ***a time of journey***. Christ is coming -that is what the term Advent means- and we are called, not to stay where we are, but to journey toward him. Isaiah in today's First Reading, looking forward to the coming of the Messiah, said: "*Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways and we may walk in his paths.*"

1. Spiritual Awakening.

It is interesting how Jesus, when referring today to the time of Noah, does not say that the people were addicted to sin, but speaks of two men who were working in the fields and two women who were grinding, that is, they were engaged in fulfilling their obligation, surely with a remarkable effort, since he refers to the daily tasks of the people of the field. It also says that the people ate, drank and were marrying. Is there anything more natural?

However, St. Paul, referring to the time of Noah, speaks of drunkenness, orgies, sexual debauchery and jealousy. Well, these things are also unfortunately... very normal.

Anyway, something that both Jesus and Paul are conveying to us is that very few among the most vicious people and those who work and sacrifice honestly, are able to do ALL things God-oriented or, in other words, we are victims of our ambitions or of the cares and tasks of the world, as the Parable of the Sower teaches. That is to say, leaving aside our moral quality, whether excellent or deplorable, we live in a way similar to those who are hypnotized or anesthetized, trapped in a world that is not real, that has little to do with our true nature, even with our deepest - and most ignored - aspirations. Let us take as an example those who defend abortion. Thus, Benedict XVI says:

Cultural trends exist that seek to anaesthetize consciences with spurious arguments. With regard to the embryo in the mother's womb, science itself highlights its autonomy, its capacity for interaction with the mother, the coordination of biological processes, the continuity of development, the growing complexity of the organism.

It is not an accumulation of biological material but rather of a new living being, dynamic and marvelously ordered, a new individual of the human species. This is what Jesus was in Mary's womb; this is what we all were in our mother's womb. We may say with Tertullian, an ancient Christian writer: "*the one who will be a man is one already*" (*Apologeticum IX*, 8), there is no reason not to consider him a person from conception (NOV 27, 2010).

Only he who renews every day his intention to be closer to God, who welcomes at every moment the subtle suggestions of the Spirit, "will be carried away", as Christ announces, that is, will live now and always deeply united to Christ. This, as we well know, has two dimensions: to repent of my sins and not to miss an opportunity to work for the Kingdom.

The ancient epic poem by Homer called the Odyssey is the story of Odysseus who traveled the world pursuing many adventures. Meanwhile back home his beautiful wife Penelope was being pursued by various suitors trying to take advantage of Odysseus' twenty-year absence. In order to keep these suitors at bay, Penelope announced that when she finished weaving a burial shroud for the king, she would choose among these persistent suitors. There was something these suitors did not know, however. Each night Penelope undid the stitches that she put in during the daytime, and so she remained faithful to Odysseus until he returned.

Something similar demands our call to be faithful to the Kingdom of God day and night, alone or in company.

While we wait for Christ's return, we are his body in the world, called to do his work. The church has been serving the world in Christ's name for two thousand years. Now is not the time to let up. It is hard, it can be exhausting at times, but it is a privilege that few enjoy.

The messages conveyed to us by the different Liturgical Times are certainly for every moment of the year, of our life, but we need to renew our appreciation and acceptance of these messages. That is why it is important that Advent lasts no less than four weeks, so that we do not forget that this spiritual awakening must be permanent... as is our tendency not to change, to take refuge in habits and comforts, leaving until later what we know to be essential at that moment.

There is a fable which tells of three apprentice devils who were coming to this earth to finish their apprenticeship. They were talking to Satan, the chief of the devils, about their plans to tempt and ruin men. The first said, "*I will tell them there is no God.*" Satan said, "*That will not delude many, for they know that there is a God.*" The second said, "*I will tell men there is no hell.*" Satan answered, "*You will deceive no one that way; men know even now that there is a hell for sin.*" The

third said, "*I will tell men there is no hurry.*" "*Go,*" said Satan, "*and you will ruin them by the thousand.*"

The most dangerous of all delusions is that there is plenty of time. The most dangerous day in a man's life is when he learns that there is such a word as *tomorrow*. There are things which must not be put off, for no man knows if for him tomorrow will ever come.

Keep awake, Jesus says in today's parable. He said it again just a few days later. And again, and again. Three times, in fact, as He was sweating blood in the Garden of Gethsemane. And he came to the disciples and found them sleeping. And he said to Peter, *So, could you not watch with me one hour?* No they couldn't, just like us. And guess what? He went and died for them anyway, for all of us who couldn't and can't stay awake like we ought to. Jesus stayed awake for us.

2. A Time of Journey.

The Isaiah reading is very fitting to begin the Advent season, for we are truly on pilgrimage during the next few weeks – making our long and tedious journey up to the Lord, in order that we may pay him homage and recognize in the Child of Bethlehem just to what length God would go to show us his love.

Folk wisdom teaches that life is a journey, a pilgrimage, we sometimes say. American author Ralph Waldo Emerson once noted, "*To finish the moment, to find the journey's end in every step of the road, to live the greatest number of good hours, is wisdom.*" All of this we consider valid in our daily activities, but perhaps it is one of the signs of the times that Christ tells us we are despising in our spiritual life.

In our mind, we do not adequately contemplate the value of each moment (scarce Recollection), we let ourselves be carried away by the impression that we have no strength, or by discouragement (unhealthy Quietude) or perhaps our capacity for union, our Unitive Faculty becomes a slave of the world and of our character and is incredibly incapable of doing what we understand to be good and would like to undertake.

Then, because of this lack of unity in our soul, ***which only the Spirit of the Gospel can give us***, we procrastinate, we postpone what is really important in an incredible way and... tragic things happen. But perhaps it is better to illustrate it with a little humor:

A man was cleaning out his desk and found a shoe repair ticket that was ten years old. He figured he had nothing to lose to try to collect his shoes. He presented it to the repairman, who was gone for several minutes. He returned and gave the ticket back to the man, who asked, *Couldn't you find my shoes?* The repairman replied, *Oh, I found them; they'll be ready next Friday.*

We should not be mistaken with today's Gospel text. The coming of God, now and at the end of time, is not a threat. It is that we must patiently prepare ourselves, as Noah did, being faithful in the little things, such as taking two little birds, a couple of dogs or mice to the Ark. His contemporaries laughed at him: the interesting thing was to sow, eat, harvest, work... as if we were eternal inhabitants of this world.

To be alert, to awaken spiritually, is not a one-time event, but a journey, a true series of ecstasies that we cannot cut short, because only God knows its importance, even if sometimes we despise - like Noah's contemporaries - the value of each instant... perhaps,

in our hearts, we think that it is enough to continue studying, working, organizing and being efficient.

But on this journey, God allows us to see storms, darkness, tears and joys. Or the rainbow. He always wants to tell us something with the signs of the times, even if it is with the small stones along the way.

Isaiah reminds us to trust in God, amid the tragedies that sometimes occur in our daily lives. Our marriage may break up; our best efforts to do good seem fruitless; we may lose our job, discover that we have a terminal illness, or become estranged from our children. In all such situations, when we feel overwhelmed by disaster and feel that our lives have no meaning, let us remember that it is always possible to follow the prophet's advice: "*O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the Lord!*"

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