



“... (We are called) to be credible bearers of the Good News.”

2023 Advent Awaken to what God is doing in the world

Readings: Isaiah 63:16-17; 64:1,3-8; 1Cor 1:3-9; Mark 13:33-37

Dear friends,

This week, as the leaders of the world gathered in Dubai for what is known as COP 28, Pope Francis sent a powerful message urging them to address the moral challenge of our time without delay. Speaking through Cardinal Perolin, the Secretary of the State, he called for a decisive acceleration of ecological transition. He writes “May we be attentive to the cry of the Earth, may we hear the plea of the poor, may we be sensitive to the hopes of the young and the dreams of children! We have a grave responsibility: to ensure that they not be denied their future”.

Today, we enter the season of Advent which calls us to be alert and responsive to what is asked of us as followers of Christ. What Pope Francis challenges us is precisely to be awakened to the signs of the times and to act out of our commitment to the Gospel values rather than to give in to the collective apathy, aided and abetted by the culture of fear and inertia. He calls us to act boldly rather than to be preoccupied with the status quo.

This is also the message of the prophet. Isaiah ministered during a very tumultuous time, which witnessed the destruction of the Temple and the long exile in Babylon. Isaiah called the people to faith in spite of their afflictions. He taught them that God’s plan for their destiny is being achieved through these traumatic times. He summoned their courage and invited them to look beyond their present predicament to the time of renewal and restoration. More importantly, he called them to commit themselves to working afresh for the realization of God’s dream. The exile proved to be the most critical spiritual exodus.

Today, in the midst of many situations of seeming hopelessness, it is easy for us to be overwhelmed and numbed. We feel powerless and unable to make a difference to the lives of many suffering people. Yet Isaiah reminds us that what is needed is the strength of faith and the power of love. St Paul, too, in the second reading urges us to remain steady on the narrow

course. When we are on the side of the poor, the vulnerable and when we stand in solidarity with those without hope and act together, we can be channels of hope. In opening our eyes and hearts to the sufferings of our world, hope can be awakened, a hope that allows us to see things from the perspective of God.

In the Gospel, Jesus uses the parable of the faithful servant, which is similar to the parable of the virgins, to remind his disciples of the need to be alert. The parable is about a kind of vigilance that allows us to discern God's presence and action in the world. It is about our capacity to read critically the signs of the times and respond to them accordingly.

In fact, throughout the course of Jesus' ministry, he often highlights the needs to be in sync with the manifestations of the kingdom. Thus, for instance, to John's disciples who want to know if he is the Messiah, Jesus simply alerts them to the messianic deeds he has been performing: the deaf hear, the dumb speak, the sick recover and the Good News is preached to the poor. To those who want to see the signs of power, Jesus compares himself to Jonah who was a sign of contradiction and weakness. He warns his hearers against the apathy and inertia that the people demonstrated during the time of Noah.

The Word of God today speaks to us about the God who does not let us get away with our propensity towards the comfortable status quo. We must not settle into complacency and forget our task of being a changing agent and a leavening force in the world. We must not allow ourselves to be numbed by the opium of prosperity, security, normalcy and comfort.

In the midst of the environmental, economic, social and moral crisis, Jesus' warning cannot be more pertinent to us. Our culture is often committed to continuity or amnesia, even when it is time to question the benefit of the status quo and to embark on a new and more sustainable pathway. We are organized in our lives, in our society and even in our churches around order, control and predictability. We fear disruption and resist change. But this can be a negation of the Spirit who does new things within the people of God.

The call of God to us is not to settle in false certitude and security. Rather it is to travel beyond our limited horizons and discern how we can be true missionary disciples and credible bearers of the Good News. As true believers, we can do well to listen, see and act prophetically so that the Day of the Lord may be source of vindication, comfort and joy to us.

Advent ushers us into the challenge of being a hope-filled people. Hope spurs us into action, bolstered by God's promise. May we become a more authentic sign of his presence and love in the world. May we like Mary who submitted humbly and courageously to God at every turn in her strenuous journey help us to be his humble servants.

Bishop Vincent Long, Bishop of Parramatta. 3 Dec 23
(SOURCE: Parramatta Catholic Outlook)