



First Week of Advent (Year C): 28<sup>th</sup> /29<sup>th</sup> November

Living the Gospel in Today's Challenging World

Reflection / Homily – Mgr Daniel McHugh

**“Stay awake, praying at all times...to stand with confidence before the Son of Man.”**

Reading an article in one of today's newspapers for 25<sup>th</sup> November, I was pleased to see more dispassionate reflection on the Prime Minister's difficulties. I am referring especially to his handling of the address to the business leaders this past week where he lost his way in his notes, and the challenges he has with the new Government Bill on the funding of Social Care. Day after day he is dealing with major issues affecting the future of the country, from a cap on migrants to the MPs' taking payment for work outside Parliament, to COVID and HS2! It is endless!

The author of the Article quoted the famous Prime Minister Harold Macmillan who had above the door of the Private Secretaries' Office; “Quiet, calm deliberation, disentangles every knot.”

I am not sure how the PM can find time for “quiet calm deliberation” in the midst of meeting leaders of different countries; handling PMs questions; chairing another meeting of COBRA and so on. But the Church may have a suggestion: across the Year it deliberately sets aside time for the Community of Believers to focus on major issues of life in relation to our Faith journey. Just now we are beginning the Season of Advent (a word meaning coming) it is a very short, but crucial, period in the year to think about the coming of Our Lord in the midst of our busy lives. The world of business and commerce is so frantic starting Christmas Shopping and even eating Christmas dinner – before Christmas arrives – that we, like the PM, can so easily miss the “bigger picture”. And that is what the Article says: the Prime Minister doesn't make time to see crises developing in the background and so avoid unnecessary own-goals.”

The matter the Church puts before us in the Season of Advent is the most important happening in the history of humanity, the coming of Our Lord. The challenge is to set time aside, to reflect and pray so that we don't miss the “bigger picture”. In a way, it is our time as a Community for the “quiet calm” that Macmillan spoke of. I have heard many people speak of Sunday Mass in that way: a time to get away from the rush of life to reflect and pray about the things that matter, things that last! At the heart of the things that last is the coming of Our Lord celebrated at Christmas, the coming of Our Lord in daily life, and the coming of Our Lord at the end of time.

Personally I think the words that can guide us through this time are those I chose for the central theme of the First Week of Advent from the first Sunday's Gospel “stay awake, praying at all times...to stand with confidence before the Son of Man.” And the prayer we can make our own is from the Psalm for the First Sunday too: “Lord, make me know your ways. Lord teach me your paths.” We live in changing times: it is only in standing back

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and listening to His Word in Scripture and the Teaching of the Church and acting on it that we can be ready to see His presence in the world, celebrate His coming at Christmas and be ready for His coming whenever that may be.

I doubt many of us are “confident” to stand before the Son of Man, but Advent, a season to turn from our selfishness, prepares us. One of the challenges facing us in the world today, especially as I write this Reflection, is the phenomenon of migration: people on the move from the poorer, less free and totalitarian parts of the world, seeking a better life for their families. What is our attitude to be as Christians, those who follow Christ who came for all peoples? In his document on Human Fraternity “Fratelli Tutti” Pope Francis encourages us to be respectful of each other recognizing rights and fundamental freedom. In a letter to a Conference seeking to further the central focus of the document, he wrote earlier in November, he says: “This is the way to build our future together.” I suggest the Lord who came for all asks each of us, His followers, to play our part as we celebrate His Coming this Advent. That really is standing back to see the bigger picture! And, it is to “stand with confidence before the Son of Man” too.

Friday this coming week is **World Migrant Day**; it is also the Feast of St Francis Xavier, the great Missionary of the East, and co-founder of the Jesuits. I wonder what he would have made of this thrust of Mission in the hands of the Jesuit, Pope Francis, in these times?

Through prayer we find strength in Jesus’ words and to witness to the action of God in our world.

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