

2nd Sunday of Advent 2104-12-07

Working for the election or getting ready for the baby.

All through Advent the theme is always about getting ready, being ready. The colour of Advent is blue, the colour of expectation. We are called to look forward to the coming of the Messiah, the Second Coming of Christ

So what are we getting ready for? I have two possible models of getting ready.

Model One

I was struck by the Toronto election preparations for the City Council and for the Mayor. Vast armies of volunteers worked around the clock getting out the votes, encouraging, advertising and generally running around. It was very impressive. And it all climaxes at the election. Finally the votes come in! And then...the volunteers go home, the election organisation is dismantled, the furniture is returned to the rental people and it's really all up to the new Mayor to make it all happen. We can all just relax and let him take it from here. (This may not reflect political actuality in City Hall, but certainly it is how it looks from the ground.)

Is this what we are thinking about the 2nd coming of Christ? "Just get him here and then he'll straighten everything out and it will all be OK and we can all relax..."

Model Two

Marta and Jas were expecting, about 3 months to go. Marta was in full nesting mode. Big bellied as she was, she was sanding and re-finishing floors in their new home. Baby paraphernalia was building up, walls were freshly painted and the house was becoming a warm home at full speed. Prospective grandparents were gearing up and friends were eagerly reading the "babyblog". Jas and Marta were also attending birthing classes and new parent training books lay all over the kitchen table. "Bump" as the baby was called at that 6 month point, was very present, but still an unknown. But Bump had already changed them in so many ways. Marta was eating very carefully, and Jas too, in sympathy. Exercise was a serious daily event and a healthy, safe environment was a full priority. Then the 9th month ended, Bump emerged and got renamed Taylor and the whole thing swung into gear. Their life as parents unfolded from all the careful work and preparation.

Is this what we are thinking about the 2nd coming of Christ? "We need to be ready to live this for the rest of our lives..."

Which one is right? Do you remember the 1st coming of the Messiah?

The People of God, humiliated by military, political and cultural domination from the World Super Power, longed for the Messiah. And that Messiah would come with might, military power, political acumen, and clear, religious teachings. He would take over and they would all be free, powerful and internationally feared. But this Jesus, the Jewish Carpenter barely noticed the Super Power's presence, preached forgiveness and love and the presence of God in all things. He invited them to be members of the kingdom of heaven right there and then.

A few centuries later the Glorious Church of the Roman Empire (the new religion of the Super Power) taught us to expect the Messiah to be an emperor, to come on clouds of glory, armies in divisions, gold in buckets, jewels in baskets, and to sweep the world clear of the enemies of the established order.

Isn't it odd that the church should be modelling the Messiah just like the Jews did, when we know they missed him for that very reason. Isn't it odd that Jesus, the image of the unseen God, the humble servant, friend of the poor and outcast, should so quickly be replaced by someone more closely resembling Arnold Schwarzenegger's characters of anger, violence, fear and terminal revenge

You see, I think we are mistaking the coming of Christ for an American Presidential election. Actually it's a lot more like the birth of a baby. (Which might be why we focus on it just before Christmas...just a thought.)

When you look at Jesus and the experience of the Early Church you have to set aside all that "Almighty" and "Victorious" and other Imperial vocabulary that has, like rust, grown over the image in thick, distorting layers, you see something quite different.

The Christ has returned. Quietly, and powerfully and repeatedly.

The first Return was the Resurrection Appearances.

The second return was Pentecost, the gift of the Holy Spirit of God. (The Spirit of the Lord which was upon him, to preach good news to the pooretc)

The next is in the promise that "whenever two or three gather in my name, I will be there, in the midst of them".

The next is the presence of Christ in the Scriptures of the Church, chosen because we found that Christ seemed to speak to us through these particular writings. We proclaim them still, centuries later, as "the Word of the Lord". We don't mean Jesus said all this, but that Jesus is here, speaking to us through them.

Next in the Sacraments of the church. When we receive communion, the touch of wine on our lips is like the kiss of Jesus, the bread we eat is himself becoming part of us.

Jesus promised to return "in this generation" and has been doing that ever since.

If you keep looking for a Messiah with nuclear-styled weaponry blowing the enemies of the which ever Super Power to eternal suffering, and confirming "people like us" in their rightful, elevated places, then you will miss the whole marvellous event.

The Messiah comes not as a celebrated Prime Minister, after which we can all sit back.

The Messiah comes as a baby does. And if we are looking for a baby coming, then listen to the teachings of the Bible. And of Marta and Jas. Get ready, get healthy, get in practice. Make your house clean and fresh for this life-long guest. Learn while you can. Start living as if it's already happened, so that as it does, you are already in stride.

And then, and only then, will you find, to your delight, that Christ is indeed already there with you. Your teacher, your light, your inspiration, your hope, your cheerleader, your coach, your friend, your colleague and your saviour. And only then, will you realise it was Christ who led you there, polite, humble and unnamed, but there all along.

The Lord is here, His spirit is with us. Lift up your hearts, We lift them to the Lord!
Don't be distracted by the glitter and the power.

Amen.