

HOMILY 1st SUNDAY OF ADVENT 2021 YEAR C
BE READY FOR ACTION, HOPEFUL, NOT SCARED?
Lk 21.25-36 Jer 33.14-16 1Thess 3.12-4.2

Welcome to the beginning of the Church's Liturgical Year C, as Christmas comes rolling in. Advent gives us short pause for thought about priorities and focus on what is important in faith and life, as Jesus prepares to depart, ready to face his fate in Jerusalem, then warning about ongoing trials and tribulations.

We remember that Luke is writing with the wisdom of hindsight and the experience of the destruction of the Temple and of Jerusalem itself by Roman armies in 70AD, a devastating and unbelievable event for the Jewish people of the time.

Yet, Jesus' words are of encouragement and hope, rather than fear and despair, despite it all. While he talks in frightening terms about the end of everything in the world, here we are continuing to live his message and trying to be faithful and hopeful disciples, despite the adversity and more difficult moments of life we all face. Our own mortality is probably the biggest issue facing each of us, in terms of Jesus speaking of the end times. The final crunch (*various theories include big freeze, big rip, big crunch, big bounce, big slurp, cosmic uncertainty*) for planet Earth, as forecast by the astrophysicists is billions of years off (*our Sun to blow out in 5 billion years or so!*), and so not our worry. Our fascination with the wonder of the universe continues, meanwhile, as the new James Webb NASA space telescope is about to launch on 18th December, superseding the Hubble up there.

Then again, what is our concern is the protection of the world in which we live and move. Climate change is a reality, as is the insanity of nuclear weapons and their proliferation, the threat of which wrecked my 10th birthday in October 1962, during the Cuban Missile crisis! As long as human stupidity doesn't win out, there's hope for our world's future. At least the issues are being acknowledged and addressed in practical ways, with not too many ostriches with heads in the sand or denialists of what's going on. It is always easier to prefer not to know the problems, especially the big ones!

At first, I thought the front page of Saturday's "**Age**" alarmist, with the headline "*Climate is driving the 800% surge in bushfires*", only to realize that it was a fact, with CSIRO (our national science agency) research revealing "*evidence showing changes in weather due to global warming were the driving force behind the boom in Australia's bushfires*", with resulting massive amounts of forested area destroyed, and the decline of the Great Barrier Reef is just another reminder of the need for environmental awareness and protection.

In the early Church, they first expected Jesus to return within a generation, but as time went on, the realization began that this was indefinite, and that passive waiting was not the way to go, but rather active building of Christian communities and commitment to discipleship in the coming kingdom of which Jesus spoke, where Gospel principles were to be applied.

While it's a getting ready for Christmas period, it's also a waiting time, looking forward to not just Christmas, but the unknown future as well, into 2022, perish the thought and beyond! So here we are, as life goes on, and another strange year approaches a close, with Advent and summer upon us. So Advent is a call to reflection, in the midst of the action.

The positive aspects are emphasized by Paul in his encouragement of the Thessalonians to continue to live out Jesus' command to love one another and grow together in faith. As we know, the ideal Christian community has never existed, and never will, here on earth, but the challenge is to keep striving to live this Gospel in the world in which we live, starting local, and going global, where we can each make a difference in our own way.

Poor, sad old Jeremiah the prophet pops up today also, in a positive mood, where his hopes are for honesty and integrity of the people who respond in hope to God's covenant of love, looking to a better future, as faith is lived.

Claude Mostowik MSC provides some good thoughts for today too, as he states: "*So may our attention and energies shift from some future fulfilment to present service and commitment? May we not look at the skies,*

but rethink the word of God that has been spoken and continues to speak in the ever-changing circumstances of our lives. As we are grounded through prayer in that word – may it turn us from fear to hope.”

And there's nothing like First Communion to give us a lift, as around 90 of our young people celebrate with their families and our faith community here at St Therese's, this weekend, and next, especially given the ongoing uncertainty about when it might be, after earlier postponement. We congratulate our students and wish them well in continuing to follow the way of Jesus in faith-filled lives and loving families, supported and encouraged by you and me.

And so, into Advent we go!

john hannon

28th November 2021