

1B Advent SFX 2023

Chronos and Kairos

For me, one of the most beautiful Catholic things is the way we mark time. "*Evening, midnight, cockcrow, dawn.*" The circle of the day, which the Church marks in its hours of hours of prayer. The circle of the year: Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter, Pentecost and the walking with Christ through the weeks marked Ordinary time. Of course Easter is at the centre of this story, our greatest feast, but working backwards we celebrate the great feast of Christmas, the coming of the Saviour, but Advent marks its anticipation. We hear the voices of the prophets and the longing of Israel, but more than that, each of these seasons of faith tell something of our human story and disposition.

By word and song, by sound and colour, the liturgical year impresses upon us the meaning of history as redemptive history, a divine drama, whose centre is Christ, whose beginnings are in the yearnings of a Chosen People for God whose ancient name is "Our Redeemer," and whose end will be at an hour we do know.

Humanly Advent is a new beginning. We all need fresh starts, and many people make New Year Resolutions. But Advent speaks of humanity needing a new beginning, the world a fresh start. Most of us would look at our lives and say we live in a state of perpetual need. There is something missing. Life in a sense is a perpetual Advent, we live with this sense of incompleteness. When we feel restless and unfulfilled, when perhaps we don't even know what we are longing for. St Thomas Aquinas would say we have a God-shaped hole waiting to be filled. St Augustine would point to human desires, our restlessness, our dissatisfaction and say that *our hearts are restless until they rest in you, O God.*

That thirteen year old Anne Frank, the Jewish girl who was hidden away in a attic from the Nazis, who expresses it in her diary when she wrote on February 12th 1944:

Today the sun is shining, the sky is a deep blue, there is a lovely breeze and I am longing - so longing - for everything. To talk, for freedom, for friends, to be alone. And I do so long...to cry! I feel as if I am going to burst, and know that it would be better with crying; but I can't, I'm restless, I go from room to room, breathe through the crack of a closed window, feel my heart beating, as if it is saying, "can't you satisfy my longing at last?"

That is the spirit of Advent, voiced in those urgent words of Isaiah today: "*Oh that you would tear the heavens open and come down!*" He doesn't mince his words. Rend, rip, rupture the heavens and come down! Come down into the mess of this world, the mess of my life. Bring us your peace. Repair what is broken. Make me complete and whole, only you, Augustine would say, can satisfy my deepest needs and longings.

Tear apart the heavens O God! Remove the divide. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Bring your love down to us and make us whole.

It was perhaps beyond Isaiah's wildest dream, but those heavens would open, and God himself would enter our time, become a tiny babe, live our history, and give us the grace to live under the eyes of God. Christ came into our time and showed us that every moment has the capacity to bring us to God.

There are two words for time in the New Testament: The first, *chronos*, from where we get chronology, is the time on your watch, tick-tock time, the passing of the days, time on the move, time passing from present to future, and so becoming past.

But there is a second word for time, *kairos*. The first words of Jesus in St Mark's Gospel, our new Gospel for this year, are about time: "*The time [kairos] is fulfilled*" (Mk 1:15). In the New Testament the primary meaning of *kairos* is **the coming of Christ**. "*Now is the favourable time [kairos], this is the day of salvation*" says St Paul 2 Cor 6. And today Jesus says to us: "be on your guard, stay awake, because you never know when the time [kairos] will come."

Kairos is a different kind of time. It is **favoured time**, time as opportunity, time that is qualitative rather than quantitative, time as a stirring breakthrough, a valuable, significant occasion. Time that is not endless and pointless but unique and purposeful.

So today's Gospel sets before us a distinctive way of living Advent. It invites us to be alert to every moment as a potential for revelation. Allow the sacrament of the present moment to form and shape us.

To be on our guard, to be awake, to be alert means to allow God to get our attention, maybe through a sacred word, through a moment of silence, or through the face of a brother or sister, a friend or stranger.

The world is very busy outside, we can get lost in our Christmas preparations, but in the Church's advent Christ whispers. Be attentive. Be alert, stay awake. "*Evening, midnight, cockcrow, dawn.*" I am here. I am waiting to be born anew in you, I am waiting for you to notice me. In yourself, in the other.