

# Sunday Homily

## 1ST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

29 NOVEMBER 2020

YEAR B

“Jesus said, ‘Beware, keep alert;  
for you do not know when the time will come.’”

Mark 13:33

### Illustration

In his famous novel *The Power and the Glory*, Graham Greene describes the last few hours of the life of a priest who was condemned to death during a time of religious persecution in Mexico. At first the priest had courageously resisted, but as time went on he turned to alcohol and became a drunkard, before having the chance of redemption.

Greene presents us with a scene in the condemned man’s cell on the morning of his death. The priest is recalling all his lost opportunities, his inner emptiness and his loneliness. Above all, he laments his lack of vigilance and awareness of the presence of God in his life. The description of his last few moments is very moving: “He felt an immense disappointment, because he had to go to God empty-handed, with nothing at all. He felt like someone who had just missed happiness by seconds at an appointed place. He knew that in the end, only one thing counted – to be a saint.” Most of us can identify with something of that feeling of disappointment, a sense that we are somehow missing out on something, or an uncomfortable fear, when we think about what we might feel if we were as close to death as the priest in Graham Greene’s book.

### Gospel Teaching

Today’s readings are full of warnings about being vigilant, about not missing out on the coming of God into our lives. In the Gospel, Jesus urges his followers to prepare for an uncertain future – the only thing that is really certain is that the world will one day come to an end. We do not know when – that’s why there is uncertainty – but we do know that it will happen. So, Jesus says, be ready to meet God at any moment.

Before you start to think all this talk about the end of the world sounds a bit far-fetched, consider this: we may not live to see the end of the world in our own lifetime, but we can all be sure that one day our own lives will end, and we do not know when that will be. We seriously need to be prepared for that. It is an interesting reflection on our society that the one thing about all our lives that is most certain is the one thing that we talk about the least and are most afraid of.

Jesus came to take the fear out of death for those who believe in him. But we still need to be prepared, ready to meet our God at any moment.

The Jews prayed seven times a day that the Messiah might come among them. However, when he came, as their brother and their saviour and their friend, they did not recognise him. They expected a powerful leader. Instead, there appeared among them a simple human being, one of their own, someone with ordinariness stamped on his very being. It is his ordinariness, his humanness, that enables us to connect with him: in Christ God meets us where we are, as we are, and shows us tangibly what he is like. That is what we celebrate at Christmas.

## Application

How did he enter our world at the first Christmas? Not in great majesty or power. He came as a helpless tiny baby. And now, we can meet Jesus in the smile of a child or in the neediness of a lonely old person. He is there in the beauty of a sunset or in the power of the wind or rain. He is there in the laughter of a teenager or in the healing touch of a nurse. We need not look far for him. However, it is so important that we learn to recognise him when he does appear in our midst.

God comes to you this Christmas. Do not miss his coming. Do not end up as that priest in Graham Greene's novel nearly did, empty and full of regret at the end. Do not harden your hearts by being caught up only in the material things of our world, failing to recognise him in the ordinary relationships and experiences of life. Seek to recognise him in the many different ways he appears in our midst. And as you become used to meeting with him day by day, so you will find you are prepared to meet him at the end of your life as well.