

Homily 1st Sunday of Advent – Year B 2nd December 2016

Pope Francis recently tweeted “The love of Christ is like a ‘spiritual GPS’ that guides us unerringly towards God and towards the heart of our neighbour.” As I read the Pope’s tweet I thought about GPSs. They are all pervasive, they can locate your position within meters, they can plan a route taking into account time of day, traffic etc. The first GPS I encountered was back in the 80’s it was used by BHP in mineral exploration, it took a ute to transport, could only locate your position and cost 100’s of thousands of dollars. I saw a route planning system in Germany in the early 90’s which took up most of a room, much of the space being devoted to data storage. Now my mobile phone can tell me where I am and the best way to where I want to go.

I recalled the first GPS we had in our car. Kaye and I were going to meet my old boss and his wife for lunch at a café at Berowra Waters. I entered the address of the café into the GPS and we set off. All was well until the GPS instructed me to leave the M7, I thought it was going to take us out to Arcadia then onto Berowra

Waters. I proclaimed to Kaye I knew a better way just follow the M1 and take the Berowra exit. The GPS protested wanting me to take this road then that, my reaction to this annoying stupid machine was to turn the sound off. Finally as we took the Berowra exit 'the penny dropped'. There is a ferry across the river at Berowra Waters and I was heading for the wrong side of the river, the café was on the other side, the GPS had been right all along. We arrived late and embarrassed. Now I still argue with the GPS but I'm more likely to trust it, it is seldom if ever wrong.

Advent is my favourite season; I find it a time of great joy and hope. The prospect of the impending birth of the Christ child fills me with wonder. Our God the master of the Universe chose to become human, chose to be born as a vulnerable baby. Why: So that I, we, may have the gift of eternal life. In the whole of human history, God chose not to be born into privilege, God chose to be born the son of a peasant carpenter, in an insignificant village on the eastern fringe of the greatest empire the world has known. Yet the birth of the Christ child the long awaited Messiah in that insignificant village would change the course of human history. Advent is the time of preparation for the

celebration of the birth of Christ, the celebration of the moment in time when God become incarnate, when God become human. Advent means arrival or coming. We know the Christ child born some 2100 years ago in the village of Bethlehem and we know Christ will come again at the end of time. In recognition of Christ's birth and Christ's Second Coming the Church divides the Advent season into two distinct parts; before December 17th the liturgy focuses on Christ's Second coming, after December 17th the liturgy focuses on Christ's impending birth.

Advent gives me a strong sense of my spiritual journey, it's a time when I check my 'spiritual GPS', it's a time when I'm very aware of being ready for the coming journey. Above all Advent is a time of great joy and anticipation. Mark's words "Be on your guard, stay awake" echo in my thoughts. I'm acutely aware that I must be ready prepared for both the coming of Christ at the end of time and the birth of the Christ child. Paradoxically I'm also aware all is a gift, I did nothing to merit Christ's birth, all I can do is rejoice in God's love and be awake to this wondrous gift. I feel like the young monk who asked his spiritual guide: What can I do to influence God? Nothing; replied the older monk,

who added “You have as much influence on God as you do on the time of the rising Sun”. Perplexed the young monk asked: “Why this Season of Advent, why all this preparation, why all these hymns and chanting of psalms”. So; the older monk replied; “so when the Sun does rise you won’t miss it”.

Advent is also a time when I check my ‘spiritual GPS’ I rejoice in where I’ve come from, I rejoice in the gift of my life and great gifts God has bestowed on me. I rejoice in my wife, my kids and my grandkids. I rejoice in my life’s journey and all the wonderful companions I have meet along the way. It’s a time when I look back and give thanks for the love of Christ in my life, that wonderful ‘spiritual GPS’ that not only leads me to the Father but also towards the heart of my neighbour. Like Paul in today’s second reading it’s a time when I give thanks for the graces you, my community, have received. Advent is a time when I pray to be strengthened by the Holy Spirit to serve all who come, and to receive them as Christ Himself. It’s a time when I pray earnestly that all the suffering, violence, and confusion of the world will encounter the new born Messiah who will console, renew and uplift all humankind.

Above all Advent is a time when I must redouble my resolve to follow my 'spiritual GPS' so that I'll know where I am and not arrive on the wrong side of the river.