

## Homily, 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of Advent – Year C 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2018

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Advent is a season of comings. It marks the coming of the Church's new liturgical year; the coming of the Christ child; the coming of Christ at the end of time; and the coming of Christ in our lives. Advent is also a season of light; we celebrate the coming of the light of Christ with the lighting of the candles in our Advent wreath. But living in the Southern Hemisphere we miss some of the symbolism of Advent in that this celebration of new beginnings, of comings, of light; occurs in the Northern Hemisphere when the nights are longest, the forest are bare and lifeless, and the chill of winter is beginning to take hold. In the darkness we celebrate light. In the lifeless we celebrate life. In chill of winter we celebrate warmth.

Living as Kaye and I do in the Blue Mountains Advent also marks the bushfire season. A time when our beloved Mountains are often ravaged by fire and many thousands of hectares of beautiful bush are reduced to a blacken 'moonscape'; A time when all too often we have witnessed the loss of many homes, even whole communities. But out of this darkness and loss; new life

blossoms, the bush regenerates, some of our native trees require fire to propagate, communities recover and rebuild and slowly the scars both in the bush and the community heal. But; we still grieve our losses; the loss of bush and native animals; the loss of homes and the loss of lives. Warrimoo Bushfire Brigade, a brigade I served with for some 30 years, meets on the first Friday of every month and at the start of every meeting the brigade observes a minutes silence for two members killed in the 1968 fires. Our losses call us into a new beginning.

Advent is a time of new hope in the dark and chill of a European winter or the searing dry heat of an Australian summer; Advent calls us to prepare for a future with hope. That hope has many symbols, the candles of an Advent wreath or the regeneration of the bush but that hope is founded in Christ.

The 12<sup>th</sup> Century monk Bernard of Clairvaux; writes of Advent as a time of preparation for the three comings of Christ: the Christ Child in Bethlehem, Christ in our hearts daily, and the coming of Christ at the end of time. Today's readings point to the three comings of Christ. In the first reading the prophet Jeremiah foretells the

coming of the Christ Child of Bethlehem as the virtuous branch of David who will practice honesty and integrity in the land. In the second reading St Paul urges the Thessalonians to imitate Christ's love, by welcoming Christ into their heart's daily, by increasing their love for one another and the whole human family. Paul calls us to unconditional love irrespective of race, creed or sexuality, and in doing so becoming blameless in the sight of God. Finally; in today's Gospel Luke writes of the coming of Christ at the end of time. On first reading Luke's writing it sounds to me quite frightening even horrific talking of 'men dying of fear'. What has this got to do with Advent a season of hope and preparation? Hope grows out of preparation. In the event of a bushfire threatening our home this summer Kaye and I have a well prepared simple plan, grab our fire bag, the cat, and leave by a route we have both discussed. I know that in the event of a large fire it would be sheer folly to try and defend our home. This judgement is based on many years fighting bushfires. I personally believe most people do not understand what a large bushfire is like, the heat, the noise and the darkness that envelopes the area. All normality ceases to exist, which is exactly how Paul describes Christ coming at the end

of time. Paul is cautioning me not to depend on the on the things I perceive as solid, the things of the world because nothing is permanent, everything will pass away. Paul further cautions me not to be seduced by the world and the pleasures of this world because they can all vanish in an instant, like the springing of a trap, leaving me dying of fear.

My scientific rational mind yells at me that Luke was writing for another age another place and time, science tells me that our Sun is about half way through its life and in about 4 to 5 billion years it will expand into a red giant engulfing the earth. Surely science tells us how the earth will end? But this type of thinking is exactly what Luke is cautioning me about. I may think I know the future but all I can be certain of is the here and now this very moment. There is an old monastic saying: Yesterday is passed you cannot change it; tomorrow is a gift you may or may not get; all you can be certain of is the moment, the here and now. Advent reminds us that there is another thing we can be certain of; that is that Christ is in our lives.

Advent reminds us to prepare for the three comings of Christ: the Christ Child in Bethlehem, Christ in our hearts

daily, and the coming of Christ at the end of time. So this Advent as I scramble to buy the presents, food, and battle the crowds in the Penrith Plaza as I struggle to put Christ in Christmas. I most find time to sit quietly and remember what Advent is all about. It's not about the crowds; it's not about the food or the presents. It's about being present to Christ in the most precious thing I have; the moment; the here and now and make this Advent a season of comings and beginnings.