



December 3, 2017 - Warning and a Blessing

By Rev. Mattei

Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come. (Matthew 13:33)

With Advent we start a new Church year: we await the return of “the Son of Man coming in clouds’ with great power and glory.” (Mt 13:26) Advent comes from the Latin word “adventum” meaning “coming.” Jesus is coming, and Advent is intended to be a season of preparation for His arrival. The gospel for today urges us to beware, keep awake and stay alert. In other words, watch out and do not be caught sleeping on the job.

Yet, in too many a way the Church has been caught sleeping, a negligence that costs us not only in the loss of members but also and more troubling in the loss of our very soul, our identity as followers of Christ. Unfortunately, many people today stay away from getting involved with the Church because they haven’t heard or, better yet, seen the message of the gospel proclaimed to them. For too long being part of the Church has been nothing more than belonging to a club and Christianity an adherence to a belief system. The bar was rather low. Apart from a few acts of piety and charity, following Christ radically was not really required.

Maybe we should consider “eternal life” as “life in him now” and not a proposition for the after life. Maybe “death and resurrection” need to be understood in light of the “incarnation” of a God who has taken seriously all of creation. Maybe we should look at Jesus’ humanity if we want to understand his divinity. And maybe we should consider visceral, unconditional and undifferentiated love for all as the central message of the one who broke down all barriers. Jesus was able to love all indiscriminately and for that he is model and example and true incarnation of the divine. The apostle Paul caught and stressed the meaning of life in Christ when he proclaimed that “There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.” (Galatians 3:28)

But Paul's chastisement of the Galatians in their understanding of the Good News rings true for the Church as well for we have created our own modern divisions: straight and gay, citizens and immigrants, Democrats and Republicans, Christians and Muslims, rich and poor, clean and addicted. Any time we create barriers and declare who is in and who is out, who is racially acceptable and who is socially unbearable; any time we set ourselves as judge over other people and scorn, abuse or even deny their humanity we, in fact, deny Christ in us (and obviously in them) and disqualify ourselves as followers of Jesus. It's like giving up our citizenship in the Kingdom and refusing to associate with Jesus, our "eternal life" (John 6:40; 17:3; 1 John 5:11).

Thus, the Season of Advent calls our attention back to discipleship. It reminds us that the work of reconciliation should be valued over making judgments; that being hospitable towards the stranger requires renouncing power structures and power games; that humility and vulnerability are necessary premises and attitudes for human encounters and that gracious behavior is more important than being right or even right belief.

There is a warning in Jesus words "Be awake." But there is also a blessing as we are called to remember and restate who we are as children of God and where our citizenship reside.

Jesus seems to warn us: Don't let the ways of the world (pride, envy, jealousy, hate, prejudice, intolerance, and the such) keep you from a life of faith, hope and love, which can give you deep joy. Be alert and faithful; live deeply in love and when the Master comes you will recognize him in the face of the people you have loved.

When we pay attention, the warning turns into a blessing: By using those words Jesus loves us tremendously and stirs us into a renewed life in him. Paul reminds us: "God is faithful; by him you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord." (1 Corinthians 1:9) Let such a fellowship bring to surface our humanity created in the image of God, and let our likeness to God be a sign of hope and renewal for the world.