



Advent 1

THE NEW SHOFAR

It is time to prepare to begin again

Do not be fooled. We will be held accountable.

Our God is not a God confined to heaven

Paul said something incredibly significant in the opening of his first letter to the Church in Corinth... *for in every way you have been enriched in Him, in speech and knowledge of every kind...* This is very much our starting point for any genuine understanding of what it means to be fully human and fully alive. We begin life in the womb as people who have been *enriched by God*. That *enrichment* is nothing other than the divine life itself. We are made *in the image and likeness of God*.

That is difficult to “unpack” but we can come to an understanding of what it means through our relationship with Jesus – the divine Son of God who was made man, who lived among us as both God and a fully human person. The closer our lives imitate Christ; the more we follow the example of Jesus, obey the biblical laws and covenants, the more we will find ourselves in touch with that inner divine likeness. It is only by understanding the ways in which we deviate from the Way of Jesus, that we can appreciate our need for the gift of forgiveness. That is our task for Advent: *how far are we from Christ-like living? Is it worth putting in the time and effort?*

no eye has seen any God besides you

The prophet Isaiah opens-up a pathway for our meditation. It must begin with a firm, life-changing profession of faith in the One, Almighty, Loving and Saving God. There *is* only one God and that is the God revealed to us in the Bible. *You shall have no other gods but Me* is a credal statement in our scriptures from Genesis through to Revelation. Equally true is: we cannot serve both the biblical God and the gods of this world. The faithful are called to *witness* to the reality of God, to the saving works of God in Christ and the ongoing activities of the Holy Spirit in the world.

And yet, too often the reality is different. **Isaiah** again... *We have long been like those whom you do not rule, like those not called by your name*. The way we live and act - as faith communities and as individual believers – does not give clear witness to the living Christ in our midst. There is too little difference between the way Christians live in the world and the way the world establishes and insists on values, goals and truths. The biblical faith was never about the salvation of individuals. It has always been about the salvation of all peoples and nations. Our

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vocation, renewed in Jesus, for which we have been empowered by the Holy Spirit, is about taking the Good News out *to the very ends of the earth* – a world of false gods. That begins in our own homes, neighbourhoods, workplaces, groups and the public arena. It is there our life-witness speaks more than any words we might utter. It is about a daily faithful perseverance in maintaining and sharing *the traditions of the Apostles* (the phrase comes from the Acts of the Apostles).

And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake.

The New Testament writings tell us we are living in the “end times”. History reached its high point in Jesus the Christ, the Son of God who ushered in the reign of God in creation. The End is “nigh” but as God wants every human person to be saved and to live in the divine presence for eternity, time has been given for all men and women to have an opportunity to repent and to turn to God in Christ (the story of the Book of Revelation). That is where we come into the work of salvation history. We are collaborators with Christ in making God’s love for everyone known and experienced in these final times. Unlike the selfishness of the world giving primacy to the self, the Gospel is about the “other” – especially the poor, the marginalised, the needy.

Stay awake? What does that mean?

Remember, this is an imperative from Jesus, a command and not a suggestion. Among other things, it requires Christians (particularly in Advent) to be on the lookout for opportunities given to us by God to engage with the world in Gospel action. We can so easily walk past those opportunities for love and mercy to be shown. But it means we need to be actively discerning the presence of Christ in the “other”. We must be at one with Christ in our own lives, men and women of prayer for whom the Bible is a part of our daily spiritual routines. St Paul’s joyful words celebrating the divine life within all humans keeps the onus for action on us.

A second aspect of what Jesus is saying here goes to the very heart of Advent. This life; the things of this world; our own presence on this planet are all transitory. It will all come to an end and each and every one of us will one day all be dust.

At the same time, we know that death is not the end. We will follow Jesus to new life, the new life He guaranteed through His resurrection. He is the firstborn, and where He has gone, we too are invited to follow and join Him and all the saints.

But it is all about being invited. It is not an automatic slide into eternal joy and peace. Some, as the Bible universally reminds us, will reject God; will refuse to follow the Way of Jesus and will find themselves among the “goats” hearing the truly terrifying command of Jesus... *You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.* These are the words of Jesus and our Advent journey is about what we do about preparing for that day. There can be no avoiding this really. The next step is our choosing the way ahead. Life? Death?

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