

## First Sunday of Advent

There are many signs around to remind us that Christmas is not very far away. As I came home the other night, I noticed that the first set of Christmas lights in our street had been switched on. The Christmas banners are now hanging from some of the light poles in Mount Barker and Strathalbyn. The Christmas Parade made its way through Mount Barker on Saturday morning and the Family Carols were held in Keith Stephenson Park on Saturday evening. If we drive through Hahndorf we are invited to welcome St. Nicholas to the town on December 6<sup>th</sup>.

But all these signs that tell us that Christmas is getting closer may not alert us to what we are really preparing for. Today we begin the Season of Advent. This season that begins the Church Year is not designed to just give us time for buying presents or cooking Christmas puddings or sending cards to our distant cousins. Those things may be very important. Advent is a time for preparing a place in our hearts for the Lord who wants to come to us again this Christmas.

We use the colour purple to make a welcome mat for the Lord. We light the Advent Candles to help him find his way to our homes and to our hearts. We look to see where he may be in need in our world and choose to welcome him there.

Advent invites us to welcome Jesus in many different ways. This first week of Advent doesn't talk at all about Christ's birth. We don't get to think about that until the third week of Advent. We take a look into the future this weekend. We are invited to get ready to welcome Jesus when he comes again at the end of time. The first week or so of Advent feels like the continuation of what we have been reflecting upon as the Church Year came to its conclusion. Jesus tells us in Luke's gospel that there will be signs in the sun and the moon and the stars. People will be dying of fear when the world collapses around them. Luke describes this as a cosmic event that everybody in the world will see. But these signs will prepare the way for the Son of Man to come with power and great glory. As people of faith, we are told not to be distressed about all that. "When these things begin to take place, stand erect, hold your heads high, because your liberation is near at hand."

Jesus goes on to give us some timely advice. "Watch yourselves, or your hearts will be coarsened with debauchery and drunkenness and the cares of life, and that day will be sprung on you like a trap." We may not be in the habit of debauchery or drunkenness. But we are all able to get distracted by the cares of life. We might remember that when Jesus told the parable of the sower, the seed that fell into the thorns was likened to those

who got carried away by the cares of life. They could produce no fruit. There may be times when God's Word cannot produce any fruit in us because we are caught up with doing so many things that we forget why we are doing them.

The advice that Jesus is giving here is the sort of advice that a loving parent might give to their children as they leave home and head out into the big wide world. Jesus knows how easy it is to be distracted from what we have learnt to be true and life giving. He urges us to stay awake and to pray for the strength to survive all that is going to happen. As people of faith we can stand with confidence before the Son of Man whose coming we await.

St. Paul offers us some advice today too. He prays for us first though. "May the Lord be generous in increasing your love. May he confirm your hearts in holiness that you may be blameless in the sight of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus Christ comes with all his saints." We might pray that prayer for our own children and grandchildren and for those we love. His advice is, "We urge you to make more progress in the kind of life that you are meant to live; the life that God wants." During this season of Advent, we humbly ask our God what he wants of us. We watch out for those signs that point us along the road that we are meant to travel. We try to

recognise some of those distractions that take us away from where we should be going.

We might choose to find some resources that can help us focus our prayer this Advent. The Office of Renewal in our Archdiocese has prepared a simple booklet that we can use to reflect upon the Gospels of each Sunday of Advent. We can use this for our own private prayer, or we may choose to invite others to pray with us as we use that booklet. Others might be using the daily reflections that are found in the Madonna. Those of us who listen to Pray as you go, have found that the English Jesuits are also offering an Advent Retreat by way of the Pray as You Go app and their website. There are many other resources that we can easily find on the web.

As we begin this season of Advent together let's ask the Lord to help us to use it well. When we see the signs that Christmas is getting closer we can ask the Lord to help us to convert those signs to remind us that his coming is getting closer. May Advent get us into the practice of welcoming Jesus wherever we may meet him. May the many ways that we welcome him each day prepare us for when he comes again this Christmas and when he comes in glory at the end of time.