

1st Sunday of Advent A.

"It is only when you have lost God that you have lost yourself; then you are nothing more than a random product of evolution." (Benedict XVI Jesus of Nazareth.)

Advent, the season we begin today, is about finding God again.

It is about finding ourselves in God, which is the only self that matters.

Ourselves and everyone with us, united in God,

is the Kingdom of God.

It is what Jesus came to announce.

The Kingdom of God is what we pray for at each Mass and many other times: "Thy Kingdom Come."

Advent is four weeks devoted to intensifying our desire that this prayer be realized:

that God's kingdom come,
that we find ourselves in God,
and that God be all in all.

"Come, let us walk in the light of the Lord" (Is 2:5).

This is from our first reading, from the prophet Isaiah.

Isaiah is the one God uses to tell us,

"An ox knows its owner, a donkey its master's manger, but my people do not know me" (1:3).

This is a more or less polite way of telling us

that we are as dumb as jackasses when it comes to what is really important.

Isaiah will also tell us, because of our tendency to be dimwits,

"The virgin will be with child and will bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel," God with us (7:14).

This will be cause for "Comfort" (40:1)

because "our infirmities he shall bear, our suffering endure,

and by his stripes, we shall be healed" (cf. 53:4, 5).

"Come, let us walk in the light of the Lord."

We know what he means:

"I am the light," says Jesus. "Whoever follows me

will not walk in darkness,
but will have the light of life" (Jn 8:12).
"Come, let us walk in the light of the Lord," says Isaiah.
Somehow, the light of the Lord is better than our own light,
or someone else's.
Whose light do I walk by?
In this case, light doesn't mean a natural agent of
now waves and now particles by which things are visible to the eye.
Light means wisdom, it means smarts,
it is the opposite of dimwittedness;
light means knowing how to live.
In the same passage of Isaiah,
this light of the Lord is also called
the word of the Lord,
walking in his paths,
the Torah of the Lord.
It is for all peoples,
so we may beat our swords into plowshares
and our spears into pruning hooks,
and study war no more, no more, no more, no more,
as the Gospel song interprets it.
The light of the Lord teaches peace.
Swords and spears,
plowshares and pruning hooks.
I drew a distinction
between our lights,
and the light of the Lord.
Swords and spears represent our light.
Swords and spears are the instruments of self-defensiveness,
of war:
rivalry, jealousy, greed, revenge, mistrust,
and security defined as myself insulated from the Stranger.
But in our reading from Isaiah,
"all peoples and nations" assemble on the mountain of the Lord.
The Light of the Lord breaks down barriers,
it reveals the Other, the Stranger,
not as a source of fear, but as a novel complement to me,
and I to her: Together, we do better than apart.

If spears and swords represent our light,
ploughshares and pruning hooks represent the Lord's.
We have to admit a resemblance to these two sets of things,
sword and spear, on the one hand,
plow shares and pruning hooks on the other.
Both sets are tools of some sort, for human labor, iron implements.
Both are sharp and potentially dangerous,
and both are used for cutting or ripping.
But there are differences, too, and these differences are the point.
Swords and spears and all weapons
are used against flesh, usually human flesh,
to maim and to kill, weaken severely and impair irremediably.
Plow shares and pruning hooks are used in the earth and on trees and vines,
and if they cut and rip and sever,
their purpose is cultivation, enhancement, life and fruitfulness.
It is the difference between our merely human wisdom,
ultimately and dead end,
and the Torah of the Lord, the Lord's light –
immediately and ultimately both
life and peace and fulfillment.
"Come, let us walk in the light of the Lord."

This is what St Paul means in our second reading:
It's time for us to wake from our sleep.
Now, our salvation is closer than when we started to believe.
The night has advanced – the night of our light;
and the Day of the Light of the Lord is at hand.

Paul uses war imagery, too, like Isaiah does:
he speaks of the armor of light:
In fact, the armor of light is Jesus himself:
Put on the Lord Jesus Christ. Let him be your overalls,
your raiment, your own identity.

Jesus is the light. He is true wisdom.
Pope Benedict XVI in his new encyclical says the Christ
is the true philosopher.
A philosopher, says the Pope,

knows "how to teach the essential art:
the art of being authentically human – the art
of living and dying." (Spe salvi 6).
Christ is the true philosopher,
coming with the Gospel of the of God.
"He tells us who man truly is
and what we must do in order to be truly human" (Spe salvi 6).

Advent is a time of waiting, expectation, and hope.
As waiting, Advent is a time of patience.
Saber esperar Blessed Rafael used to say,
Know how to wait.
Advent is also expectation.
Expectation implies and expected:
a son or daughter coming home for Christmas,
a new child,
the return of a friend.
In Advent,
we have some sense of what we expect,
though it is not yet here, not yet, and we don't see clearly.
Advent is also a time of hope.
We get an idea of hope
by a feel of how things are without it.
A non-Christian epitaph on a sarcophagus in early Rome said,
How quickly we fall back from nothing to nothing.
This is life without hope,
without the light of the Lord.
Paul could write to the Christians,
"Do not grieve as other do who have no hope."
Hope has a certain future,
even though it doesn't know the future,
and "only when the future is certain – as a positive reality –
does it become possible to live the present as well."
Advent reminds us that it is possible to live well
in the present, for the sake of the future.
"Hope draws the future into the present...
the fact that the future exists changes the present;
the present is touched by the future reality,

and thus the things of the future spill over into those of the present" (Spe salvi 7).

The object of Advent hope
is that we walk in the light of the Lord.
The object of Advent
is the Kingdom of God.
It is not the Messiah, it is not the Christ,
it is certainly not the human birth
of the Son of God that happened 2000 years ago.
It is what the Son of God was born of a woman
in the fullness of time to bring:
"Behold, the Kingdom of God is at hand;
I am the light of the world."
The object of Advent hope
is what Jesus in our Gospel today calls
the parousia, that is, his Presence complete and full that enlightens and gives joy to our
present,
whatever our situation is.
This is the Kingdom of God:
It is here
yet it is always coming:
as we say at each Mass:
"Thy Kingdom Come," and,
"Deliver us O Lord, from every evil;
grant us peace in our day.
In your mercy keep us free from sin and protect us
from all anxiety
as we wait in joyful hope
for the coming of our Savior, Jesus Christ."

December 2, 2007