Homily for the 1st Sunday in Advent 2025 Year A

Today is the first Sunday of Advent and, like Lent, it is a solemn period in the Church's year, when by thought, prayer and fasting we prepare ourselves to celebrate the coming of Christ to us in the great feast of Christmas.

From today the priest's vestments change to purple, a sign of mourning, sorrow and repentance.

All the prayers and readings reflect and relive the hopes and expectations of the Prophets of the coming of God to man, the Advent of the Messiah. The mood of those readings moves between hope and consolation, and threat and warning, for when God comes close to man it is a time not only of joy but also of judgement.

Now the life of the Church, the seasons of the Church, and our faith, are not just nostalgia for a past event, but are also a preparation for a future event, the coming of Christ, and our own personal meeting with Christ.

Past and Future, two mysteries wrapped up in one event, reflecting mans' deepest needs and longing for more than just the present moment gives. The whole of life is therefore a form of Advent, a culmination for all of us in our personal meeting with Christ, a moment of judgement and of joy.

Realistically we do not live life with everything focused upon the future. Now, this present moment, is important, and one's faith has to give value and significance to this day, to this situation, because just as life can be seen as Advent, so too each day is a form of Advent; God comes to man, and is with man in the events of each day.

It is part of the painful business of growing and maturing in one's faith to be able to see the hand of God, the presence of God, in the ordinary events of life. The best way to prepare for the coming of Christ is never to forget the presence of Christ.

God is not only the creator and sustainer of human life, but by actually becoming man, by taking flesh, He sanctified and made holy mans' ordinary way of existing.

Because of that historical fact of 2000 years ago, the coming of Christ as Man, we can no longer look at reality as God being up there or out there and live as if we exist on a totally separate plain.

Because God became Man, He is with man, comes to man, and meets man in the moments and circumstances of each day.

Let us open up our eyes of faith in the next few minutes, wipe away the sleepiness imposed by the routine of living, and try and see how perhaps God comes to each of us each day.

He comes to us under the guise of Challenge.

It may be in the want and need of our fellowmen, their physical, material, or spiritual poverty, that in responding to that need to the best of our abilities and resources is how we meet Christ. We cannot always rise to the challenge. Our finances and energies are limited. But if we close our minds to a challenge, then we close our hearts of the presence of God to us in that challenge.

He comes to us in Ordinariness.

The routine obligations, duties, and boredom of each one's particular state of life are all very ordinary. It is in faithfulness and perseverance in these that we meet Christ. All of us know of wonderful examples of ordinary people around us, who in very difficult circumstances, struggle to remain faithful to vows, promises, duties and standards, first undertaken in moments of love, joy and enthusiasm. The passage of time sometimes dulls the importance of those promises. Those lives of faithfulness, though unspectacular, are miracles of sanctity and holiness, and are remembered and treasured by God.

He comes to us in Sorrow.

Failure, disappointment, heartbreak, illness or the death of a loved one; in bearing each of these crosses we meet Christ. Nobody can totally be protected from this, the dark, the shadow side of life, but if we can discern the presence of God with us in those painful moments, then we can transform them from the negative things that they are. We can turn them around and make some spiritual use and gain from them. They are little deaths that are always followed by Resurrection.

And importantly, God comes to us in Joy.

Moments of happiness, pleasure, fulfilment, and the experience and sharing of love; in the actual enjoyment of all these things is when we meet Christ. Religion has often erroneously been presented as a grave and joyless relationship with God. But the human heart and spirit has a God-given appetite and capacity for joy; it is a limitless capacity that only God himself can fill and satisfy. It is a sad thing, but some religious people genuinely feel hesitation and even guilt about the experience of joy. God allows us to experience legitimate joy, not only to ease the burdens of life, but also as

a foretaste of the eternal joy to come. It is alright to enjoy life and be joyful, for it is in the experience of joy that we meet God as He most truly is in Himself.

And finally, God comes to us sometimes most mysteriously in Silence and in Absence.

These are moments when we can no longer feel or sense the presence of God. Just to know how to remain still and faithful in those moments is to meet Christ.

Some of the great Saints who were masters of prayer and the interior life, teach us that God is always much closer to us in that profound sense of the absence, than He is when we are basking in the consolations and delights of a sense of His presence.

Each ones' life and each one of our days has its moments of challenge, ordinariness, sorrow, joy, or emptiness and each in its own way is therefore an Advent, a way of God coming to us and a way each of us can come to God. By our meeting life and living it to the full, by rising to its challenges and bearing its ordinariness, by enduring its moments of emptiness and sorrow and revelling in its joys, we open ourselves to God and we meet God.