

1st Sunday of Advent (C)

29th November 2015

'It's not Christmas'

Jer 33: *a virtuous branch grow for David*

1Thess 3-4: *be blameless in the sight of our God and Father when Jesus comes ...*

Lk 21: 25-28, 34-36: *stand erect, hold your heads high, your liberation is near ...*

Online, recently, I saw a simple flowchart ... "to work out if it's Christmas." It's very simple indeed, and goes like this ...

Well, it's definitely still November, and we've barely entered Advent, so I think that we can safely say that "It's not Christmas"!



For us Christians, the beautiful season of Advent is not to be overlooked. The season of preparation for Christmas — the waiting, and getting ready — is a very important time, and means that when Christmas *does* come, we are all the more eager and ready; we are all the better prepared in our hearts to welcome Christ. We have four weeks to get ready for Christmas, and so let's not ruin Advent, spoil the calm

and write it off. I have a friend in California who yesterday posted online a picture of him and his family putting up their Christmas tree ... "It's our tradition," they said — "get the tree up the day after Thanksgiving." Well, it's up to them, but as far as I can see it'll mean they are sick and tired of Christmas long before December 25th. In truth, then Christian seasons work like this: Advent, from today until December 24th; Christmas season from December 25th until the feast of Jesus's Baptism, January 10th; i.e. 26 days for Advent, followed by 17 days of Christmastide. That's the way it should work, preparation time, followed by festal time. Just the way it would make no sense to constantly keep the feast of the Resurrection throughout Lent, so really we shouldn't keep Advent as if it were already Christmas. We all know how hard that is to do ... but the better we keep Advent, I think, the better we will actually enjoy the festivity of Christmas, and not reach that saturation point where "we wish it were all over."

So, we begin today the new Church year — 'year C,' the year we hear Luke Gospel on Sundays — not with any

Christmassy readings at all, but with readings more reminiscent of the ‘end of year’ texts that we heard a couple of Sundays ago. “Stay awake ... Stand ready ... You do not know the hour ...” But then, also, amidst the warnings, “You will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory ... Your liberation is near at hand.” The point of Advent’s waiting for Christmas — all our praying, longing and hoping — is for us to reflect on our readiness for Christ to come again. Are we actually ready in our hearts to welcome the Lord, or aren’t we? Let’s not ignore all the Gospel pleas to examine our lives in the next few weeks. We won’t be focussing on Mary and Joseph, angels and donkeys until the very last (4th) Sunday of Advent. The rest of Advent, beforehand, is to “get ready” for that.

I was thinking that we are very lucky. As Catholics — coming to Mass, hearing the Scripture, being present with Our Blessed Lord — we do really have somewhere to hide away from the commercial juggernaut that is the secular Christmas. I don’t mean hide away from the real

world, the reality of life; but hide away from the distraction, and in the Church find shelter in the quiet peace of the Lord. Advent should be a sober and gentle season, where we can come to tranquil reflection, finding the reality of what Christmas will mean, by waiting patiently for the Lord to come, in His own time. Don’t underestimate the benefits of keeping Advent well, making Christmas wait until the 25th itself, rather than trying to anticipate it all the time.

The words of St Paul tonight/today are full of that attitude of peaceful hope: “may He so confirm your hearts in holiness that you may be blameless in the sight of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus Christ comes ...” Let’s ask the Lord, this first Sunday of Advent, to make our hearts peaceful this season, and give us that time and space for Him that He desires of us, and will make the wonder of His birth at Christmas all the more longed-for and welcome. May our parish have a truly blessed Advent 2015!