

HOMILY FOR THE FIRST SUNDAY IN ADVENT 2021

I haven't been to a movie at the cinema since before COVID so, when I went just this Friday, I wasn't conditioned for the ordeal. I enjoy a movie on a day-off but, have become accustomed to simply hitting the pause button when the call of nature beckons. So, I certainly wasn't prepared for the '2 ¾ hour', latest James Bond movie. There was no pause button so, you either miss a part of the movie or sit through what becomes an experience of increasing pain and discomfort. Of course, me being me, I even had to sit through the credits to see if those words of prophecy would come on screen. You know the ones I mean. Every time a new James Bond movie comes out, questions are raised as to whether they will make another one.

However, much to my great relief, the last word on 'everything' was displayed – "James Bond will return".

This also captures the cry of the Advent Season – "Jesus Christ will return".

Rather than being the final word, it begins our new liturgical year, proceeding then into the Nativity of the Lord where we can only admit, that if it has happened before, it can happen again. Jesus Christ will return. Even heaven is waiting for the event so if you miss it in this life, you won't miss it from heaven.

Reflected in the readings for today, is the age-old problem of too many of the faithful, hitting the pause button and not even returning. Hope is lost in impatience and apathy.

The first reading described a response in the midst of the Babylonian exile, where the people of Israel had been hitting the pause button on their faith and moving to take interest in the religions of their captors. God wasn't acting fast enough for them. Jeremiah affirmed the return of the Dynasty of King David, who was considered the most popular king Israel had ever had, for under him, there had been a time of peace.

The promise of 'integrity' which Jeremiah mentioned, also to be understood as 'the promise of righteousness', was not dependent upon the moral and ethical behaviour of the people. It was a righteousness which God would implant from his own being, to which people would respond with, hopefully, the same dedication as good citizens of a city. Still, many went away because they would not wait.

When Luke wrote his Gospel, the expectation was that Jesus would return within a short while. However, even in the fifty years after the resurrection, Luke described how members of the Church had lost hope – "Hearts coarsened with debauchery and drunkenness and the cares of life."

Even back then, many wanted what was coming to them, then and there. There was no sense of being an historical people, prepared to carry the faith on into the next generation. So, they simply hit the pause button and moved on.

Advent presents us with a time of training and conditioning. It is a little like a 'Christian Boot Camp' where we try and get ourselves back to the fitness we may have lost.

It is a period where we return to the promise of Jesus Christ himself, that he will come again in glory. It is a time for reflecting on how we need to strengthen our faith as we await that promise, rather than question why God is taking so long.

Perhaps Paul's words in the second reading throw light on what our 'Christian boot camp' might entail.

An increase in love – which comes when we trust God's love from the cross; hearts confirmed in holiness – which means to be focussed on and moved by what God has done in Jesus Christ and; to be blameless - which is to accept the truth that Christ has died for each and every one of us and, each and every one of our sins.

As we focus in Advent on the return of Jesus Christ - the hope of heaven and earth - may it help to condition us for the year ahead and enable us to endure the pain and discomfort of having to hold on and wait.