

Second Sunday of Advent

Dear Parishioners and Friends,

We know that in Advent our attention is focused on the coming of the Lord. Whether that coming is at the end of time or whether it is that historic coming in Bethlehem in the person of the Christ child, the Church invites us to make ourselves ready for our encounter with Jesus, whether it be as judge or as infant born in time. The question we ask ourselves is how best we should prepare. The advice given to us right at the beginning of the season of Advent is that we should be perpetually vigilant, we should be on our guard against sleeping or slumbering, largely because we will get no advance warning of the second coming. Where our commemoration of the first coming is concerned, we are given notice: *ten shopping days left until Christmas!* This latter clarion call means something very different for most people this year. The question still remains as to how we are to welcome Christ when he comes.

One possible answer comes in the soprano aria in J.S. Bach's Advent cantata *Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland* BWV 62. The soprano speaks to her own heart: *Jesus is coming, he is coming to me, open wide your heart.* And that is it, we must open our hearts precisely so as to let Jesus in. He is coming to us, like the dew coming down from heaven, he is descending so as to make the earth his dwelling. He will only be successful in the measure that we make him welcome. Indeed one of the impulses of Advent is that of welcome. In the days before the pandemic so radically changed our world, the run-up to Christmas was a time when friends met up, office parties were held, students came home to see their parents, ties of friendship were renewed, neighbours made an annual visit to one another's houses, officially to admire the Christmas decorations but really to greet one another and wish one another well. Indeed at this time too, doors were open to strangers, a welcome was issued to those in need, a heightened awareness of those who were deprived of the things we took for granted – warmth, shelter, food, human contact itself – meant that we welcomed them into our hearts.

All of this openness to others is perfectly consistent with Bach's soprano's command to her own heart: open yourself to Jesus, let him in. And we know that Jesus knows he is welcome in our hearts and in our lives once we let others, regardless who they are but especially if they are in need of love, enter our hearts we are also letting him in. In Advent the Church reminds us that he is at the door of our hearts knocking, and we best prepare for his coming by softening our hearts and then opening them to him when – at midnight, at dawn, at midday – he comes and knocks. We know that when we open our door to him, just as he did at Emmaus, he will invite us to dine with him. And this is just one of the anticipated joys of the Advent season.

Father Patrick