

Attending Advent with dignity

Advent is upon us. It has tiptoed quietly through the crisp fallen leaves of late autumn and has shyly arrived at our doorsteps. I say shyly because it is a time that many of us promise to focus on but in reality we can pay little attention to. It is so easy to let Advent pass us by.

Why is this so? Could it be that, like our preparations for Christmas, we build up the expectations too much and we cannot achieve what we set out to do? This is a very significant time in the church's calendar.

The beginning of the new church year. We feel that we should be doing something significant too, and experiencing God's love in a new and special way. As well as our desire to let Advent make a big impact it also happens to be one of the busiest times of the year and we can be swept away by the activity in our lives. Before we know it, advent has passed for another year and we are left making fragile intentions for next time round.

Maybe we need to have a rethink about Advent. Maybe we need to listen carefully to the words of Jesus in today's Gospel (Luke 10: 21 – 24):

'Filled with the Holy Spirit, Jesus said, ' I bless you Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for hiding these things from the learned and the clever and revealing them to mere children.'

Christ reminds us that we need to come as children come. No big agenda, no 'game plan' to judge ourselves by..... just as ourselves. And by this I mean our humble, beautiful, already God filled selves. And, as Nelson Mandela said in his inaugural speech :

**'We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us.
It's not just in some of us, it's in everyone.'**

This season of the incarnation, when God became flesh and blood in a simple stable, is not a time to set ourselves unreachable goals, but a time to simply draw closer to the God that is already within. God came as a humble baby, born to humble people. It is in our humility that we can find the threshold to our divinity and a deeper awareness of our own divine nature and that of those around us:

**The door to God, the door to any grace is very little, very ordinary.
Those must remember who would gain this place, this rule that does not vary:
all truth, all love are by humiliation guarded, as One has testified before.
This may explain why the serf finds salvation,
And kings and scholars pass the little door Jessica Powers**

These humble moments of grace are constantly being offered to us, all we have to do is look a little more closely at our daily lives. For example, after a disagreement with one of my daughters last week, I felt unsettled and ill at ease with the atmosphere between us. As we sat at the breakfast table the next morning, I was talking to myself in my head about all the things that I could say or should say to try and heal the situation when I felt her warm hand move gently into mine. No words said, just a touch of love under the table for no-one else to see. I held that beautiful hand with real awareness of the shift in the dynamics. The touch of her hand brought blessing and healing to us both. Peace flowed and we moved on, but I was left with a huge sense of how powerful her touch had been. It was love in action, it was a warm touch of hope that made my frozen heart melt, it was divine.

My learning heart is beginning to realise this Advent that, if we can attend to these every day and ordinary aspects of our lives with greater dignity and awareness then a new perspective will open to us. By, 'attend with dignity', I mean to become more aware of the present moment as a moment of grace. Our homes and daily lives are already holy. Because of the incarnation, every person became priceless and sacred and precious. Christmas reminds us of how we are intended to be as human beings and of how God's presence is as near to us as the next conversation, the next cuddle, the next breath. These ordinary moments are all chances for our hearts to be opened to the nearness of God.

So as I start my preparations for Advent this year I am going to try and remember that, the door to God, the door to any grace is very little, very ordinary. To try to be more aware of the gifts of Grace that are constantly being offered in my daily life. That God's blessing is already within and all me. That Advent is not a time to worry about 'getting right' but, as Joyce Rupp suggests in her reflection, 'Advent Stars,' that Advent is a time to, 'Let the Star of Wonder draw you to appreciate the beauty in and around you.' I am going to try and see more fully that, through the incarnation, the kiss of the Divine is already on my soul and that when I attend each ordinary moment of my day with dignity and humility I am offered a chance to recognise this wonderful fact and to draw closer to my loving God.

