

(AD 1) FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

(NOVEMBER 29<sup>TH</sup>, 2020)

**Readings:** *Isaiah 62:16 – 17 & 64:1, 3 – 8; Ps. 79 (80):1 – 3, 14, 17, 18; 1 Corinthians 1:3 – 9; Mark 13:33 – 37.*

Over the past months we have done a great deal of waiting – waiting for an effective vaccine, waiting for the results of elections, waiting to be able to go to mass again, waiting to sing in church. Meanwhile the world – or much of it – is waiting for “Christmas”, by which it means the annual family celebration of togetherness, and, for those in the Northern hemisphere, some relief from wintertime blues.

But today the Church begins a new season of waiting. Yes, of course, we are like the world in waiting for Christmas – though our Christmas isn't one that can be stopped by economic problems or Government regulations. We can truly say our Christmas will happen because it has already happened!

But the Church is waiting for more than its annual celebration of the birth of the Saviour, important though that celebration is. We, like the Corinthians, are *waiting for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed*. It seems likely that Paul and those to whom he was writing expected that revelation to happen in their lifetimes: nearly two thousand years later that expectation has faded among most Christians. But in the Gospel our Lord warns his disciples *Be on your guard, stay awake, because you never know when the time will come...And what I say to you I say to all: Stay awake!*

And in the verses which come immediately before today's reading he stresses the uncertainty of the time of the coming of the Son of Man: *Of that day or that hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven nor the Son, but only the Father*. So there is no point in our puzzling our minds, and asking “Is this the time or not?” We simply do not know, and we are not meant to know. We are meant to live every day and hour of our lives as if the Lord will arrive the very next minute.

One of the great hymns of the English tradition is Bishop Thomas Ken's *Morning Hymn*, written for the scholars of Winchester College. It's probably out of fashion now, but its second verse makes a good reflection for us as we enter on this season of waiting:

*Redeem thy misspent time that's past. Live this day as if 'twere thy last.*

*Improve thy talent with due care. For the great day thyself prepare.*