First Sunday of Advent – Year B

Readings: Isaiah 63:16–17, 19; 64:2–7; 1 Corinthians 1:3–9; Mark 13:33–37

Theme: Stay awake and be watchful – Prepare the way for the Lord.

Today we begin a new liturgical year with the season of Advent. Advent is a time of waiting, hope and preparation. We prepare ourselves to celebrate the birth of Jesus at Christmas, but Advent also reminds us that Christ comes into our lives every day and that one day we will meet him face to face.

In today's Gospel, Jesus gives us a very simple but powerful instruction: **"Be on your guard, stay awake, because you never know when the time will come."** Jesus uses the example of a man going away on a journey, leaving his servants in charge of his household. Each one is given a responsibility, and the doorkeeper is asked to stay awake. The message is clear: we must not become careless or spiritually asleep. We must remain faithful to the responsibilities God has entrusted to us.

But what does it mean to stay awake? It does not mean that we should live in fear, constantly worrying about the end of the world. Rather, it means living each day with faith, love and a sense of responsibility. Sometimes we are so busy thinking about tomorrow that we forget to live today. We worry about our future, our health, our finances, our families and our plans. These things are important, but we must not forget the most important thing: our relationship with God and with one another. We may not know what tomorrow will bring, but we know that today is a gift from God.

The first reading from Isaiah gives us a beautiful prayer: **"You, Lord, are our Father; we the clay, you the potter, we are all the work of your hand."** Isaiah reminds us that we are God's people, and even when we become weak, lost or distant from him, God never stops being our Father. Advent is an opportunity to return to him, to allow him to shape our lives again and to renew our faith.

St Paul, in the second reading, encourages the Corinthians by reminding them that God is faithful. He says that God will strengthen us and keep us firm until the end. What a comforting message as we begin Advent! Our preparation does not depend entirely on our own strength. God is already at work in us. We only need to open our hearts and cooperate with his grace.

So, how can we make this Advent meaningful? Perhaps we can begin with a very simple daily practice. Every morning, before we begin our busy day, let us pray: **"Lord, show me someone today with whom I can share your love, kindness, mercy and forgiveness."** It may be someone in our own family, a neighbour, a lonely person, someone who is unwell, or even someone with whom we have had a disagreement.

Mother Teresa used to remind us that whatever we do for our family members, we do for Jesus. Sometimes we look for God in extraordinary experiences, but we forget that he is already present in the ordinary people and situations of our daily lives.

And every night, before going to bed, let us ask ourselves one simple question: **"Where did I find Christ today?"** Perhaps we found him in a kind word, a phone call, a visit to someone who is lonely, an act of forgiveness, or a moment when we patiently listened to someone. These little things may seem insignificant, but they are often the places where Christ meets us.

Dear friends, Advent is not simply about counting the days until Christmas. It is about preparing our hearts to welcome Christ. Let us not be so busy preparing our homes, buying presents and organising Christmas celebrations that we forget to prepare a place for Jesus in our hearts.

The early Christians had a beautiful expression: *Maranatha* – "Come, Lord Jesus!" Let that become our prayer throughout this Advent season. May we be able to say it not only with our lips but also through the way we live.

As we begin this Advent journey, let us remember: **We do not know what tomorrow will bring, but we can make today a day of love, kindness and faithfulness.** That is what it means to stay awake.

May the Lord find us ready, not because we have done extraordinary things, but because we have been faithful in the ordinary things of everyday life.

"Maran atha" (Rv 22:20) is an Aramaic (Syriac) expression that means: "Come, Lord Jesus." It was used as a greeting in the early Church. When believers gathered or parted, they didn't say hello or goodbye, but *"Maran atha!"* If we had the same spiritual outlook today, it would revolutionize the Church and the lives of its members during this Advent season.

Come, Lord Jesus! Maranatha!