



AUSTRALIAN CENTRE FOR  
**CHRISTIANITY AND CULTURE**  
WISDOM FOR THE COMMON GOOD

1st Sunday of Advent

Fr Frank Brennan SJ  
Rector, Newman College University of Melbourne  
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Isaiah 2:1-5; Psalm 121; Romans 13:11-14; Matthew 24:37-44

Listen at <https://soundcloud.com/frank-brennan-6/homily-271122>

It's been a week or two of stark contrasts on the international stage. First we had the world leaders heading home from COP27 in their polluting private jets with not much to show for their efforts. Our own Minister for Climate Change Chris Bowen remained upbeat having told the conference that 'Australia is back as a constructive, positive, and willing climate collaborator' and that 'This fight cannot be done by one nation - all emitters past, present and future have a responsibility to act. We need to drive an inclusive climate agenda.' Then we had a series of leaders' summits with Xi Jinping launching a charm offensive with our Prime Minister Albanese while he publicly shamed Canadian Prime Minister Trudeau. Trade and politics are mixed. Then we had the commencement of the World Cup in Qatar. There are estimates that up to 5 billion people on the planet will watch one or other of the games in the days ahead. Meanwhile we learned details about the appalling labour conditions imposed on migrant workers to build the stadiums in time. Then came the various symbolic stands for the rights of gay and lesbian persons in Qatar. Sport and politics are mixed. And all this time the war in Ukraine drags on inexorably with no one having any idea how it might be drawn to a close.

Meanwhile in our somewhat beleaguered church, we had further revelations of sexual abuse by bishops in France. Pope Francis stepped in and suspended the entire leadership team of Caritas International. He summarily dismissed the Members of the Representative Council and the Executive Board, the President and Vice Presidents, the Secretary-General, the Treasurer and even the Ecclesiastical Assistant. And the American bishops chose as their president a bishop who is said to have had long term antipathy to Pope Francis back in the days when they were both in Argentina.

There are a lot of things in our Church and in our world which are unresolved. Here we are on the first Sunday of Advent with the invitation to a new beginning, an invitation to fresh hope, an opportunity to prepare for Christmas and the blessings of the Christ child who will bring joy, hope and wonder.



In today's first reading from the prophet Isaiah, the poet proclaims a message of great hope in the midst of a world of division, war and injustice – a world not unlike our own. The hope is founded on a vision. The mountain of the Temple of the Lord will be lifted so high that all the nations will see it and will stream to it. All peoples regardless of their nationality, ethnicity or religion will be drawn to the mountain of the Lord, to the temple of the God of Jacob, so that he may teach them his ways and so that they may walk in his paths. His law will go out from Zion and the oracle of the Lord from Jerusalem. Scripture scholar Carol Dempsey says: 'Here the poet hints at God's sovereignty and suggests that this God is not only the God of Israel but also the God of the nations, and this God of the nations is also Israel's God. Hence, the poet suggests that there will be one God and one people, and the House of Jacob - the "temple" will be a dwelling place for all nations'.<sup>1</sup> We could dare to hope this Advent that Christmas might be good news for all people, not just Christians.

In response to such a vision and to such a law, people will positively work for peace and reconciliation. They will hammer their swords into ploughshares, their spears into sickles. Nation will not lift sword against nation, and there will be no more training for war. What a wonderful vision; what a wonderful hope and how desperately we need it. Dempsey reminds us that 'the prophet's image of God as arbitrator is just one image offered in the prophetic corpus and stands in stark contrast to the more familiar image of God as warrior judge offered in other prophetic texts'.<sup>2</sup> It's an image which we need to hold close this Advent.

In the second reading, Paul tells the Romans that the night is almost over and it will be daylight soon. 'So let us give up the things we prefer to do under cover of the dark; let us arm ourselves and appear in the light.'

In today's gospel from Matthew, Jesus warns that we must stand ready because the Son of Man is coming at an hour we do not expect.

For us in the southern hemisphere, Advent is a graced time which coincides with the end of our year. We have time to wind down and to prepare for Christmas and for the summer, and hopefully even get to the beach. We're not so foolish as to expect that Christmas will perfect our world or even our church. But we do have sufficient faith that the promise of the one to come can help us bring fresh perspective to what it is that he asks of us and what it is that is needed one step at a time, one advance at a time, so that the migrant workers in Qatar can live a

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<sup>1</sup> Carol J Dempsey, 'Isaiah', *The Paulist Biblical Commentary*, Paulist, 2018, p. 604 at p.609

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.



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dignified existence, so that individuals can be cherished and respected regardless of their gender or sexuality, so that peace might be possible for those who are innocent and defenceless in the Ukraine, so that we can be responsible curators of creation while attending to the needs of development for those who have known poverty for too long.

This may be an impossible wish list but it is the yearning of our hearts and the sinew of our prayers.

Here in the Eucharist at the beginning of Advent we can find peace and consolation as we pray with the psalmist:

Let us go rejoicing to the house of the Lord.

I rejoiced because they said to me,  
"We will go up to the house of the LORD."  
And now we have set foot  
within your gates, O Jerusalem.

Let us go rejoicing to the house of the Lord.

Jerusalem, built as a city  
with compact unity.  
To it the tribes go up,  
the tribes of the LORD.

Let us go rejoicing to the house of the Lord.

According to the decree for Israel,  
to give thanks to the name of the LORD.  
In it are set up judgment seats,  
seats for the house of David.

Let us go rejoicing to the house of the Lord.

Pray for the peace of Jerusalem!  
May those who love you prosper!  
May peace be within your walls,  
prosperity in your buildings.

Let us go rejoicing to the house of the Lord.



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Because of my brothers and friends  
I will say, "Peace be within you!"  
Because of the house of the LORD, our God,  
I will pray for your good.

Let us go rejoicing to the house of the Lord.