



Sisters of Saint Joseph of the Sacred Heart



First Sunday Advent 2006.

Isaiah 63:16- 64:7, 1Corinthians 1:3-9, Mark 13: 33-37.

Greetings as we start a new year in the church.

May this year of grace see us awaken anew to the possibilities of real discipleship.

From Isaiah 64:1 we begin with a summer image. As we watch the fire make the billy boil let us remember that the name of God is awesome. We give thanks to God who has done good things for us beyond even our imaginings. No ear has heard nor eye seen how we have been blessed.

These words of a people who had known exile and restoration are not about superficial goodies but about hope. Even as the flood waters begin to recede so we, people of hope, begin to imagine the new creation rising from the chaos.

The Gospel set for this year is Mark.

This church community was establishing itself in Rome during the uncertainty of the reign of Nero. Peter and Paul had been killed and the community faced the threat of persecution and the pervasive fear that carries.

With this as the backdrop we can begin to understand our reading for today.

“Be constantly on the watch! Stay awake!”

We have been empowered by Jesus to be partners in the project of renewing all creation. This cannot be achieved unless we are fully alert.

Mark uses a picture of a person left in charge of a large household while the owner is away. Look at the images of the danger times, dusk, midnight and cockcrow and think of the last evening in the garden. Judas appeared leading an armed crowd. The disciples slept through Jesus' agony. Peter, so cocksure about everything, denied he knew Jesus. Night time is a common metaphor for lack of vision. According to Isaiah that lack of vision can be called sin.

The writer got a little carried away and called the people polluted rags, and dead leaves. Of what sins are the people accused?

Wandering away from God, acting like people who do not know God, allowing their hearts to become hard, not praying, being too lazy even to acknowledge God as trustworthy.

This is a different list I would imagine from the ones we make for the sacrament of reconciliation. The focus of the list is the accusation of not having the attitude appropriate for a servant/partner of the God who saves.

Sin in the scriptures is often spoken of in terms of right attitudes rather than infringements of the commandments.

Paul spoke of the commandments as a basic moral code for all. He also said that keeping the commandments was a sort of level one for beginners. A disciple is to be more concerned about a life directed by the Spirit who leads us forward to a new relationship with God, others and the world.

Being awake is not a virtue in itself but a condition of readiness. It is an acceptance of the mandate to heal and to save. This is the time for setting our goals for the year that has begun.

Let us make the prayer of Paul to the Corinthians our prayer for one another.

“I thank God for you all the time,
because through your union with Jesus you are rich in wisdom.
You do not lack any spiritual gift. You will be strong to the end.
God is ever faithful.
It was God who called you to fellowship with Jesus.”

Patricia Stevenson rsj.