

Bishop's Reflection – First Sunday of Advent

In a rare address to God himself, more becoming of the prophet Jeremiah, Isaiah pours out his heart to God and, with it, our hearts, too. His greatest concern: the state of the world and the fickleness of his own people, who, despite everything God has done for them in the past, have turned away from him and are delivered into the hand of their own sins.

“O that you would tear open the heavens and come down.” What a beautiful opening line at the outset of Advent, so that you might open our eyes to your glory and stop us in the course of our sins.

“O that you would tear open the heavens and come down.” How the world is in need of new sight, new inspiration, a total reboot from the way things are being run. Mired in mediocrity and the murkiness of moral relativism, where there is no clear right, nor wrong, we are adrift on stormy waters and shipwrecked by our own doing.

“O that you would tear open the heavens and come down.” A phrase especially relevant in this year when we study the Gospel of Mark. Mark who begins his gospel with the Baptism of Jesus and describes the event as “the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him” and who, in his pension for the dramatic and for everything happening all at once, tears open the heavens with each successive teaching and work, causing people to gasp in awe and wonder, astounded at who this might be. Mark also seizes upon this image towards the end of his gospel, at the moment where Jesus dies, when the curtain of the temple, separating the place where God resides from his people, is torn apart, dramatically signalling a new relationship and the reconciliation won for us in and through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

“O that you would tear open the heavens and come down.” As we orient our footsteps towards Christmas and the birth of our Lord in our flesh, we wait in silent expectation, making Isaiah's great longing, for God to act, our own.

Our waiting this year takes place during a pandemic, universally felt and experienced throughout the world. Though it has rattled all of us to some degree, it has also served to bind us together, at least for a short time, as we grapple with the consequences of everything we do.

It has also forced us to look at the anchors in life: our faith, God, priorities and essentials. We have been challenged to open our eyes to some of the shortcomings in our society and in our own lives, too, but it has also opened them up to new possibilities and greater initiatives of solidarity. To say that the Lord has been absent is somewhat short-sighted. He has shown himself, again and again, in the most vulnerable in our society and in those who have been forced to work on the frontline.

“O that you would tear open the heavens and come down.” Our cry has not gone unnoticed, nor unheard. “God works for those who wait for him...”, who are attentive to his voice and willing to change their ways. In Christ, our God is not aloof, in Christ, our light in the darkness of every age.