

1st Sunday of Advent

Isaiah 2:1-5

Rom 13:11-14

Mt 24:36-44

The Latin phrase Nunc Pro Tunc means 'now for then.' In legal circles the word 'then' looks backwards, enacting legislation retrospectively. In the realm of the Vatican, the word 'then' looks forward. In 2018 the Pope accepted my retirement as Ordinary of OLSC – that was the 'now,' but the 'then' only became reality in late 2019!

Advent is a kind of Vatican style Nunc Pro Tunc. Jesus' first coming has occurred when He announced the nearness of God's kingdom, but that kingdom will not be fulfilled until He returns. Advent reminds us that the Kingdom is nunc pro tunc, now for a future 'then.' Sadly, the season of Advent, like Christmas, has been secularised. Advent Calendars no longer lead us to Christ's birth, they provide a chocolate a day, or even a dram of whisky a day until we can dig into the celebration cake on Dec 25th. Even without the religious content, there is still an attempt to create excitement among children and perhaps panic among adults for this festival.

For the faithful, Advent is a time of hope as we look forward to Christ's second coming in glory, but it reminds us that we have to maintain some balance and not let our excitement get out of control. We must prepare without premature celebration. We must be patient but with an active readiness, because like Jesus Himself, we don't know when the end will come. The space between nunc and tunc is the time between the promise being made and its fulfilment. It is the meantime and our challenge is to live in this time as Christ's faithful who are destined for the end time, or the time of completion. So what are the guiding principles of our lives in this meantime?

If our principle is accumulation of wealth, health and happiness, we must abandon anything and anyone that gets in the way. If it is to serve others, then selfishness must be set aside. If we see ourselves as made in God's image, then we must live our lives on earth to make the values of His kingdom visible so when we shed this mortal coil we will be in His nearer presence in His heavenly kingdom – nunc pro tunc. If we dismiss God and live as if death is the end, then we will live for the present moment, separated from God, now and for ever.

Advent is the season when the Church calls us to wake up to God's presence in our life. There is always the danger that the Advent alarm clock doesn't wake us up, or its sound is drowned out by the noise of busyness and partying. Or simply that the child in the manger who became the fool on the hill of Calvary, is ignored. God cannot force us to love Him, but He does offer us a sense of purpose, hope and the promise of eternal life. It is our choice whether we accept this invitation or not. However, the invitation does come with a warning; if it is not accepted, spiritual, emotional, intellectual and physical death will be the end.

God wants us to call on His power which provides what we need now, in the present meantime, as people who work for what is yet to come. Advent has two parallel themes running through it. One theme is the focus in the office of morning prayer, namely, to wake up for the night is past. God is stirring and the awaited day – the tunc – is coming. The

second theme is found in the evening office which says, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favour with God, you will conceive and bear a son.' The nunc is already here.

We must resist the temptation to play down the second theme of Jesus' birth and turn Christmas into anything other than a Christian celebration. The second temptation is to over-focus on the family in the crib and ignore the truth that the child is God himself who has come with power to reunite us to Himself.

One slogan some Christians use is that we should keep Christ in Christmas. We should also keep the Mass in Christmas. The Mass of Christ is also a nunc pro tunc – it looks back to Bethlehem and beyond to the Garden of Eden when God's story of our salvation began and looks forward to Christ's return in glory for judgement and hopefully, our heavenly reward.

Have a Happy & Blessed Nunc Pro Tunc Advent.

Msgr Harry Entwistle
Nov 30th, 2025