

1st S. of Advent, Yr C.

2-12-18.

A new beginning.

I have a question for you to start with: Is there anyone here who has never moved house? If you haven't you may not recognise what I am talking about, but if you have, our readings today are all quite familiar.

Most of us move house because it no longer fits. It's become too small or too big. It no longer meets our needs, it's worn out, the neighbourhood has changed, there are umpteen reasons why we need to move, including the need to bearers to our work, family cares, and so on. There may be some good memories attached to the house we're leaving, but the need to move is greater.

That's a little like what Advent is about. The Gospel today begins with a host of warnings about our home, planet earth, coming to its end,- with natural disasters of all kinds abounding, It's fearsome.

But then a note of hope appears, with the Son of Man coming on a cloud, and we're advised to stand erect, to hold our head high, for our liberation is near at hand. We're moving house!

Our first reading begins to spell that out, where we read in the hopeful words of the prophet Jeremiah: "In those days and at that time I will make a virtuous branch grow for David, who shall practice honesty and integrity in the land. In those days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell in confidence."

The new home we're moving into is the Gospel of Luke, a mansion when compared with the Gospel of Mark; with a richness and vistas which Mark's Gospel can't touch. With its infancy stories of the Annunciation, the Visitation and the birth of the child Jesus in the stable at Bethlehem, it lays a foundation of gentleness which we find repeated in the parables of the Prodigal son and the Good Samaritan, and with its legion of miracles and wealth of teaching, we are in for a feast, - but also with a warning not to let this abundance of feasting get to our heads, - as we heard in today's Gospel: "Watch yourselves, or your hearts will be coarsened with

debauchery and drunkenness, and the cares of life, and the day will be sprung on you suddenly, like a trap."

It is St. Paul, in our second reading, who once again gets us in touch with reality. Just like when you move into a new home, you have to learn new and different patterns, where to put things, where the light-switches are, which steps to watch, what the unfamiliar noises are, and so on; so in this house of the Spirit we're encouraged to learn new things.

As St. Paul tells us: "May the Lord be generous in increasing your love for one another and the whole human race. May he so confirm your hearts in holiness that you may be blameless in the sight of our God and Father. I urge you and appeal to you to make more and more progress in the kind of life that you are meant to live: the life that God wants, as you have learnt it from us, and as you are already living it."

As I said, Advent is a little bit like moving into a new home, and it is up to us how well we settle into it. With Christmas and the festive season coming up, how are we going to decorate our new home? Will it be all baubles and tinsel, or will there be room for the more serious things in life, - a reminder that the feast we are about to celebrate is not only about the birth of a child, but also about a man who hung and died on the Cross for our sake, and who invites us to rise with Him to a life of promise that will last forever." What will we do?

As the last words of today's Gospel have it: "Stay awake, praying at all times for the strength to survive all that is going to happen, and to stand with confidence before the Son of Man."