

May I speak in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen,

Happy new year! The Church year begins today, the first Sunday of advent. The Church year begins with the Sunday we look forward to the first coming of Christ to remind us that the whole of our Christian lives are lived in anticipation of the second coming of Christ, when all things will be reconciled. When justice will flourish, and all relationships restored.

This Sunday is also the Sunday on which preachers traditionally preach on the first of the four last things. Death, Judgement, Heaven, and Hell. We begin the Church year not only looking forward to the end of all things, but we begin by calling to mind our own endings, death. We are invited to call to mind that which we all too often avoid - our own mortality. As we prepare ourselves to celebrate the feast of the Incarnation - that God became one of us, immortality took up mortality for our sakes, we are invited to contemplate what that mortality means.

Our readings help us accept this invitation to reflect. ‘We all fade like a leaf’ Isaiah reminds us. Our destiny is not in our own hands. We cannot will or act ourselves beyond the end of our earthly lives. ‘The Lord is our Father; we are the clay and you are the potter.’

Our Gospel reading reminds us that not only will we pass away, but all things will pass away. “Heaven and earth will pass away”. These very stones will pass away. Our church, our homes, our lives, all these will pass away.

During Advent, during the whole of our Christian lives, we’re invited to prepare for something more. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. We may pass away, but because God has taken our human nature to God’s very self, by becoming one of us, the Word made flesh, our passing away is not a full stop, but a comma. A pause at the end of our earthly lives to the new life of the Resurrection to which we look forward after the end of all things. The new life of the Resurrection made possible by the human life of God whose birth we prepare ourselves for in Advent and we celebrate at Christmas.

The grace of God, as our second reading puts it, has been given to us in Christ Jesus. Through this grace, we are strengthened in the midst of death, to face the fact of our death, to be strengthened to the end, to our ends.

The invitation this Sunday to reflect on our own mortality, is an invitation to reflect on what it means that Christ became one of us, shared in our humanity and mortality, that we might share in Christ's divinity. As we are reminded at the beginning of this new church year, that all this will one day come to an end, we are invited to reflect on whether we are really living our lives as if this is the case.

Are we building up lives of stuff, pretending that what really matters is only what is passing through?

Or are we building up lives based on that which will not pass away, the grace of God, the gift of God's very self, the foretaste of which we've given even now in the Sacrament of the altar, the eucharist, the body and blood of the heavenly banquet, which through the birth of God as one of us in the Christ child, all of us are invited to share for all eternity. It's this to which the whole of our lives look forward, in this season of Advent and beyond.