

**Advent** is a season that looks back and looks forward at the same time. We look back to the birth of Jesus in simplicity over 2000 years ago. We also look forward with hope to the unfolding of the kingdom of God as Jesus comes in tenderness and love to meet us face to face.

Advent is a season of **attentive waiting**. What is that waiting like? Is it calm and tranquil as each day flows simply from one to another – as the season's customs become as comfortable as your favourite sweater – no pretension – just a good warm fit....Others want you to take it off and put on something more festive – 'not yet', you say – 'I'll wait a while'....how does that influence your *sacred space* or your *music list*.

You might take more attentive time with *scriptural prayer* during these weeks – sitting comfortably with the prophets - Isaiah and John the Baptist – as you open yourself to their challenges they might cause some discomfort as you hear their words.....

'let every cliff become a plain' – what does that mean for you? – is it a smoothing out of a relationship that has become rough? - think about it – give it time.....especially if you are a *minister of the word*.

'the eyes of the blind will see'....what fresh insights might await you over the next few weeks....'I am not fit to undo his sandal strap' – what humility – what does *humility* mean concretely to you in your *ministry*? - was that an insight that came to John in the distraction free zone of the desert? – have you got some desert places to go to....where are you not distracted? Is there a time during your *meeting* to be prayerful.

Or maybe you attend on Elizabeth and Mary as they wait in expectation....in your quiet accompaniment some of their joy...graciousness...acceptance...trust might rub off...'the child in my womb leapt for joy'....'let what you have said be done to me'... All these possible people in the waiting room of the Bible in Advent or at the *welcome place* in your church. As you reverence the Eucharist you carry the graces of the visitation go with you.

Who else might be there in the waiting room that needs attention?...the doctor with the test results...a relative after a job interview...an asylum seeker looking for news about the future...a homeless person seeking a place for the night...for the moment you hand them over to God...you wait and see what you are asked to do in the situation...you may be called to be a rock for someone or to allow another to take care of you.

Advent is a season of **patient attentiveness** - like the Advent Calendar with its daily thoughts and treats - one at a time – a surprise each day – no need to rush ahead – I can wait until tomorrow. What does that patience feel like? Is it a struggle not to anticipate – to take a peak at what's ahead – to slip into the future without opening up the gift of the present - the now is rich don't pass it by getting ready for the *big days*.

What is that now like? .....is it comfortable....secure...calm...or is it something I want to escape...to avoid...to run from...anywhere but here and now. Patience...stay with it...you are not alone...do not be afraid. Much of *funeral ministry* is about gentle, patient accompaniment

Advent is a season of quiet **attentiveness**. We wait in a spirit of calm expectation, with our eyes wide open in gentle alertness, for the unfolding of the gifts that Jesus has prepared for us – is there a gift you don't know of or one you are afraid to *share in your group*.

A Christmas song tells children '**you better watch out**'. In the Gospel of Mark, for the first Sunday of Advent, Jesus challenges us to '**stay awake**'. These two phrases have something in common – being alert and being attentive. In the *Baptism Team* that is a gift at the family meeting.

What is this attentiveness like? Is it noticing the peace that comes when we create the right environment – no phone or radio or T.V. – maybe some gentle music – a candle – a quiet place or noticing that you are feeling more chilled out as the season moves forward – could this mood rub off on your family.

Is it about hearing God crying from the wilderness of our mindlessness – speaking words of promise, encouragement and renewal?

