

The coming of the Son of Man is the coming of Christ into our lives. This indeed is the constant refrain of the Gospel in our liturgical year detailing the coming of Christ over one lifetime now made available forever. We know the ending of this year and it's beginning and both seem to mingle for a while in this first week of Advent, but the coming of Christ into our lives is not so predictable. It floored St Augustine completely when he was reading today's passage from Romans. He was in torment over past sins and weeping bitterly when he heard

*“a boys voice or a girls voice, I do not know, but it was a sort of sing-song repeated again and again, Tolle lege, tolle lege – “Take and read, take and read”. I ceased weeping and immediately began to search my mind most carefully as to whether children were accustomed to chant these words in any kind of game, and I could not remember that I had ever heard any such thing. Damming back the flood of my tears I arose, interpreting the incident as quite certainly a divine command to open my book of Scripture and read the passage at which I should open.... I snatched it up opened it and in silence read the passage upon which my eyes first fell*

*“ Not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and impurities, not in contention and envy, but put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ and make not provision for the flesh in it's concupiscences” (RM 8 13) ( from Confessions of St. Augustine translation by FJ Sheed)*

He's not out of the woods yet of course and the rest of his life can be characterised as a continual struggle between his intellect and his feelings but it's all the better for that. He's been described indeed as *“neither denatured academic nor effete upper class connoisseur but a man of feeling who takes ideas seriously”* (p57 How the Irish Saved Civilisation. Thomas Cahill 1995). The point being that our “watchfulness” isn't about removing ourselves from the reality of this world's demands but of living in this world more truly, more deeply, as if Christ matters in all we do. In the gospel passage the men are still at work in the fields and the women still at the grindstone but we must live as if the Son of Man is already part of our lives so that when the end comes whatever that might be he will find us ready.

*“Let your armour be the Lord Jesus Christ.”*

We live with unpredictability – that's life – but our preparation for this unpredictability is Christ whom we can hope for but not control – indeed if we allow Christ into our lives then prepare for even more unpredictability. There is a sort of detachment which can come with this knowledge which is not of our making.

I am struggling now to find words which might help – but I'll try this

On a recent visit to North Norfolk I found myself sitting in a hide with two other birdwatchers. It was pouring with rain and the two other birdwatchers were spending their time scrolling through their phones to find out where the rare birds were – there were plenty of birds on the reserve outside but they were used to these and were looking elsewhere for stimulation - they weren't present to the reality in front of them, and all its wonder. In marked contrast to this I'd spent the previous day on a marsh with not another birdwatcher in sight but full of birds, ordinary birds, going about their daily business. The light was good, the seat was comfortable and I'd approached an area of salt marsh, mudflats and open

sea without, I thought, disturbing anything. I felt part of the landscape and the ordinary became extraordinary for me- it was as if the whole world were displaying its finery, a whole eco-system at work which gained meaning because it was full of what others might dismiss as ordinary birds in constant interaction with their environment and each other. But one has to be patient and watchful in order to experience this, to become a part of it, to see the world for what it is. It's just such moments that tell us that when the end time comes – it will be all right.

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