

An Advent

If we are to understand this properly then we do so by seeing it as both a coming and a proceeding, a moving forward into a different level of comprehending our selves, our lives and our relationships. We are beginning a new cycle and it should be for us a moment when we pause and take stock. It should be an opportunity to reflect and to access that which relates to our lives, and to contemplate all that this means. It asks us to consider the mystery that lies at the heart of each human life and to see our proceeding, our journeying, as a pathway into this mystery.

Yet our journeying into this advent is not an easy path to walk. All of us wish for the love and the tenderness which provides us with security and sanctuary. Such expectations are though more often than not speared on the lance of indifference and apathy, and they die in coldness and unconcern. How strange then that the people we see in the Gospels are precisely these sort of people; the outcast, the sinner, the dishonoured, those who have seemingly abandoned any hope that their lives could reach into the mystery which we so cherish. In the depths of this abandonment they are the ones who encounter Jesus and in the intimacy and sacrament of that encounter, their hope is restored, their lives given meaning, the pathway opened up for them once more. It is a pathway to be trod no longer in isolation, but with a sense of true purpose that fills them with hope. It is a true hope because in his offering of himself to them, they know that Jesus will not abandon them, give them up as lost, or leave them to their own devices. He walks with them and he brings them into a relationship with God in which they are made whole, their sins forgiven and their lives restored, their closeness to God renewed. All of this manifests itself through the love which he pours out into each person he meets. It is a love which is freely given, never asking for anything in return, and which ultimately delivers him to the Cross, the greatest outpouring of the mystery of God.

The mystery which lies at the heart of human understanding is to comprehend what the Cross means and what this seemingly shameful event reveals at the level of human and divine love. Jesus in his earthly life offers us all he has as the way of showing us the path to the Father. His obedience to the Father expresses this love in all its variety, its tenderness and mercy, its compassion and kindness. But more than anything else it shows itself in its total acceptance to the will of the One *who so loved the world that he gave up his only Son*. We cannot cancel our death but what Jesus does on Calvary is to make death the moment when that Trinitarian love which flows between Father Son and Spirit is accomplished in human terms and shares a nexus with the divine.

This is the journey we are taking. Our advent is a pilgrimage of discovering the reality of Jesus in our dimension. Many of us may feel distanced from his love because we feel distanced from human love, from its tenderness, its compassion. We feel unable to experience human generosity because our experience of our world is of a world no longer interested in engaging on such terms. We need to make the connection of love with Jesus, with his message and unlock the human and divine experience of love that dwells in each person.