

## Sleeping Peacefully?

Isaiah 2<sup>1-5</sup>; Psalm 122; Romans 13<sup>11-end</sup>; Matthew 24<sup>36-44</sup>

*For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers. (Romans 13<sup>11</sup>)*

One thing I tried to do each year for my A level students was to arrange a trip where the students could experience two contrasting forms of Christian worship. One year we went to Mount St Bernard Abbey and after the midday sung office, a monk came to speak to these very fashionable 17 and 18 year olds. My heart sank as this monk, perhaps in his 30's, walked towards us: he had sellotape round his glasses and he was wearing white socks with his sandals. However, this monk soon had the students spell-bound. They asked him if he had a TV and he said he didn't know. He found it difficult to have his mind dominated by visual images. He confessed that the brothers watched a film each year on Christmas Day and having seen 'Harry Potter' the previous year he couldn't get the image of Dumbledore out of his mind when he tried to pray. Then they asked what his job was: to get the brothers up to pray at 0300. Why do you pray then, they asked? Because Jesus said he would come like a thief in the night and they pray for his coming. What do you say in your prayers? Having been a pub manager, he said that on Friday and Saturday night he often prayed for those who were doing things they would later regret. After a visit to the Bullring, where the Salvation Army were there with youngsters giving their testimonies, we made our way to Hockley Pentecostal Church. The worship certainly contrasted with the monastery, but the question about what they did as a Church got the response that at 0300 they were out with flip-flops and water in the minibus to help those in distress on the streets. They students made the connection between prayer and action - we were all one the same side even in the middle of the night!

There is a divide in themes between the readings for today - the New Testament is all about sleeping and waking and the Old Testament is all about peace. I did think that we could do one theme this year and then the other in three years, but then thought that there may be a link:

- ✦ Our world is very good at sleepwalking into conflicts. That happens when nations and individuals think that they are not accountable to anyone beyond themselves. But that theme of accountability is present throughout advent - and we are accountable to God. Instead of turning against each other, nations need to **go up to the mountain of the Lord**. Individuals and nations are accountable to God. When God is the one to **judge between the nations** and he is the one that will **arbitrate for many peoples**

then it is possible to **beat swords into ploughshares and spears into pruning hooks**. Do note that weapons aren't just laid aside but are remade and recreated.

- ✦ Voices that are (as the Psalm invites us) engaged in **praying for peace** are too busy to argue: that is true for individuals as well as nations.
- ✦ If we are people who takes Paul's challenge to **lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armour of light** we are awake to better priorities than self-gratification, which is the source of conflict. Peace - that shalom that is peace with God, the world and ourselves - comes when we **put on the Lord Jesus Christ**. This isn't as a veneer or a gloss coat above everything that already exists - we have to change our underwear as well!
- ✦ Then we come to the great Advent theme of the promise of Christ's return - something that will happen but we don't know when. If we knew that date - or even the date of our death - we could live as we liked right up until the last minute. Because of the uncertainty we have to live each moment as if Christ might return then.
- ✦ The urgency becomes pressing when we realise that at the coming of Christ there will be division. We have a message of hope to share - that is of waking up to God's good news in the Jesus promised in the Advent message and how that changes us and our world for the better. If this was something we really woke up to we would not be hesitant evangelists.

Are you sleeping peacefully? Wake up! We have work to do - work that leads to peace and life.