

Once a group of young people went to visit a famous Hindu monk or ascetic well known for his wisdom. To test his wisdom a young man asked him, “Master I want to be in heaven after my death. So how many days before my death shall I prepare for that?”

Immediately the monk replied, “Just one day before your death is enough.”

This was an unexpected answer for all. So, one asked again, “But, how I will know when I am going to die?”

In a calm voice monk replied, “Since you do not know the time of your death start preparing now and be always prepared.

Today we begin the season of Advent which is composed of four weeks. 1<sup>st</sup> part of advent the liturgy calls us to reflect and prepare for the second coming of Christ at the end of the world. In the second part of advent especially from December 17<sup>th</sup> the liturgy prepares us to commemorate the 1<sup>st</sup> coming, the birth of Christ.

“Be watchful! Be alert! For you do not know when the time will come”, is the central theme of today’s liturgy.

This uncertainty about the end of the world and second coming has led to paranoid behavior of human beings.

Until the September 9/11 attacks, the tragedy in Jonestown on November 18th, 1978 **represented the largest number of American civilian casualties** in a single non-natural event. Excessive fear of the end of the world led about 900 followers of a religious cult called Peoples Temple led by Jim Jones (in 1978) to commit mass suicide. Similarly in 1979 around 39 followers of another cult called *Heaven’s Gate*, committed mass suicide in in fear of the end of the world thinking that it would get them ready and pass through Heaven’s Gate into a higher existence. Many books have been written on this topic some movies are also made

Since the very beginning of Christianity, people have been predicting about the end of the world and the second coming. The last one was year 2000 when many thought that the world is going to end.

So, instead of being scared or being paranoid, Jesus tells us to be alert, watchful and be prepared because Christ's *Second Coming*, coinciding with the end of the world, can occur at any time. Nobody knows exactly.

The most important coming of Christ is not his coming in the past or his coming in the future but his coming in the present. His coming today, in the present time in my lifetime through the Eucharist, through word of God and also in the various persons and events of life. This coming is hardest to recognize. We know about his past coming through the history and through the scriptures and start preparing to commemorate this event each year at Christmas. His future coming is so much abstract, so much uncertain, that it does not bother us much.

But his coming today is real. He comes today, in my life, but I may fail to recognize him. Jesus comes in someone needing help financially, emotionally, or spiritually. Such person could be around us, in our own family. Jesus comes in an orphaned child, a sick person who cannot afford to get medical help, a lonely neighbor or a family member who sat across the table during this thanksgiving dinner.

Mother Teresa was able to recognize Jesus in the dying and destitute and abandoned children and she loved them. One priest tells that when St. Mother Teresa received communion, he could see a glow in her face because she was receiving Jesus. This same priest tells that the same glow could be seen in her face while she nursed the wounds of some dying person as if she was nursing Jesus himself.

How we deal with his present coming will determine whether or not we are ready for his second coming or end of the world.