

## "SOMEONE'S AT THE DOOR"

TEXT: "So likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things,  
know that it is near...even at the doors".  
(Matthew 24: 33)

INTRODUCTION For a few moments here this morning - think about your door. The door to your apartment, if you're a city dweller. Your front door, if you live in a private house. The door to your room, if you live in a residence.

Picture your door. Think of its color, or colors. Its appearance on the inside and how it looks from the outside. Its decorations - knobs, bells, or buzzer. Its thickness. The locks and chains that secure it. The numbers or letters that identify it. Imagine the sounds it makes as it opens and closes.

Now, reflect on the role that door plays in your life. It insures your privacy. It separates the world inside your place from the world outside. Consider how it lets you get out and enables others to get in. A man's home is his castle, we say, and the door is where his castle begins.

DEVELOPMENT Because a door divides our public life from our private, a sharp rap on the door or a long push on the bell can put a family into orbit.

One of the youngsters calls out, "Mom...someone's at the door". With that things begin to happen. A husband and a wife caught-up in a bitter argument over money must call a truce to the battle for a little while. The newspapers get picked up, a shirt gets buttoned, a blouse gets tucked in. "Mom...dad...someone's at the door". Get the dog...stop him barking. Turn down the TV..the stereo. "Someone's at the door". A couple of teen-agers huddled on the sofa break clean. Hair is primped on the run. And everyone prepares to smile. "Someone's at the door". Who is it?

ADVENT IS LIKE THIS To get to the point, Advent is very much like that. This is the second Sunday of the New Year - the Christian year, that is. It begins with Advent and we're now seven days into Advent. Again, we are reminded that the Christian faith does not rest on some discovery that we have made about God. It is a response we make to a coming - the coming of the Lord's Anointed - the Son of God!

And this coming is very much like having someone at the door. Indeed, our Lord used the figure himself in speaking of His Second Coming, His Second Advent. Said He,

"So likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things,  
know that it is near, even at the doors...."

You ask, what things? Signs of sacrilege in Jerusalem. A darkened sun and moon. The powers of the heavens shaken. The gathering of the elect from all over the earth. The 24th chapter of Matthew is one of the most difficult passages anywhere in Scripture. Jesus seems to have two or three things coalescing as He speaks to His disciples about the future: (1) the destruction of the Holy City. (2) the coming of the Son of Man. (3) the end of the age.

ADVENT / INTERRUPTION

Getting back to that door of yours, any Advent of the Lord is always first experienced as interruption.

"Someone at the door!"

That Presence standing..knocking..having come to you...is profoundly disruptive. Whether on a personal scale or on the saale of history as a whole - this drawing night of God has to be profoundly and disconcertingly intrusive. Routines are broken. Accepted values challenged. Goals re-examined. Sins are exposed. Virtues are tested. Previous plans are tossed out. This is so because any Advent of the Lord produces a collision of calendars.

See that young man over there travelling over to Lincoln Center on the crosstown bus, violin under his arm. He has his calendar. Another two years of lessons, a year of study abroad, a chair in a respectable orchestra, then first violin, then a touring artists giving concerts in his own right.

Or, that pretty brunette in a nursing uniform, walking on the path next to the East River down by NY Hospital. It's her lunch break and she's a nursing student. She has her calendar, too. Another two semesters of study, then graduation, perhaps some more study in hospital administration, presently a floor of her own to manage. Some day, head nurse at a large medical center.

Or, take that young lawyer hailing a cab out there on 86th Street. He has his calendar. Right now he's breaking in with a large firm. Hard work. Long hours. His wife feels like a widow. But he hopes to be a partner by the time he reaches 35. Then he'll be pretty well set. Senior partner some day.

Don't miss that young lady hanging on to the subway strap. She has her calendar. She goes to night school to improve her writing. From nine to five she edits for an adagency. She plans to marry next Summer, and to continue her career as a professional free-lance writer.

And that serious looking chap stepping off the #4 bus up at Broadway and 120th Street....he's a Union Seminary student. He has his calendar. A Church of his own after graduation next June, just to get his feet wet - 3 years at the most, then a move to some county seat, then 7 - 10 years later...something big and significant.

We all have our calendars. Is it wrong to map a future, to be ambitious, to plan ahead, to block out the various steps we hope to travel? No, not at all. But that's not the point. The point is that even the good in life can be the enemy of the best. All of our planning amounts to "in-house" projections.

But when someone is at the door, those plans and those projections are interrupted, called into question, into review and re-examination.

A STEP FURTHER

I take it that this is what Jesus meant when He alluded to a likeness between how the world will be when He comes again and how it was in the days of Noah.

"As were the days of Noah" He said, "so will it be in the coming of the Son of Man. They were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, and they did not know until the flood came and swept them all away...so will be the coming of the Son of Man"  
(Matthew 24: 37-39)

There is nothing wrong with eating and drinking and marrying and giving in marriage. Those verbs tend to imply a productive economy, a political system, a way of life. What is wrong is that when God is near, all of our provisional plans and ambitions must then be measured against His presence. Yes, even the good can be the enemy of the best when God moves in upon us. Let that truth knock at the door of your mind. That's why Jesus, in His first sermon, said:

"The times are fulfilled. The kingdom of God  
is at hand. Repent and believe in the Gospel"

"Someone's at the door". "So likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors."

ADVENT PEACE Any Advent of the Lord is experienced first as interruption. Yes, but for those who respond and open that door and by God's grace synchronize their lives with the calendar of God and go on to embrace the values of His Kingdom - that coming can be experienced as peace. And this, because Advent not only judges, but it vindicates as well.

And we need some vindication of Christian values in our world. So - the poor in spirit, those who mourn, the meek, those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers, those persecuted for righteousness' sake, all who have been reviled and slandered against for the sake of Jesus - all...all are confirmed as citizens of the coming age.

And that He is at the door, knocking, brings my soul to peace because it reminds me that another has a will for our world and that all of the initiatives do not come out of City Hall, or Albany, or Washington, or the UN. Yes, another has a will for our world, never forget it - One who is at the door. He has not abandoned us to our sin and our stupidity. He cares...cares enough to dome, to help, to heal, to save, to seek. He knocks at the door.

How often we have heard a TV commentator sum it up by saying, "Now, in the final analysis". Those experts, as they clear their throats to say "In the final analysis". What the Bible is telling us is that in the "final analysis" there is no final analysis about anything save as it is related to this One who is at the door - knocking!

We have denied to ourselves the comfort of this Advent hope because so much of the eschatological language of the Bible is complicated. We get weighted down with apocalyptic images and spend hours wondering who the beast represents and what the horns mean and so on. But let us not be closed to the affirmations of Christian eschatology, which are essentially two in number and which I believe with all my heart: (1) God will triumph over His foes. (2) And the reign of God will ultimately prevail. Let us build in to the future on those spiritual truths.

ADVENT Advent is for something more than writing Christmas cards and putting together our shopping lists. It is decision time, too. Jesus Christ always evokes a decision. You cannot "assimilate" an Advent. It is direct confrontation. One thinks of those opening notes of Beethoven's Great Fifth Symphony. "DA, DA, DA DUM". The consensus is that Beethoven was trying

to convey the feeling that destiny was thumping at the door. One gets a sense of that when he opens his soul to that powerful music.

"Lift up your heads, O ye gates and be lifted up ye everlasting doors. And the King of Glory shall come in. Who is this King of Glory? The Lord of Hosts. He is the King of Glory".

CLOSING It's unlikely that the world will respond until the Church responds. It's unlikely that the Church will respond until you and I have responded - in the affirmative and really mean it. Don't ask for whom He knocks. He knocks for you!

"O Lord, with shame and sorrow,  
We open now the door.  
Dear Saviour enter, enter,  
And leave us nevermore."

Now help us to prepare ourselves for that Second Coming when He comes looking for the fruits of the Spirit. In His name we pray. Amen