

HOMILY ADVENT SUNDAY 01 - A
(Isaiah 2:1-5; Psalm 122; Romans 13:11-14; Matthew 24:37-44)
“Put on Christ and be ready to meet him in unexpected ways”

Recently I came upon a billboard which read, complete with pointing finger, “Are you ready for Jesus’ return?”

Put on Christ, and be ready to meet Jesus in the most unexpected places.

J. Sauer, of San Antonio, Texas, wrote in the *Living With Christ* some years back: “Every Advent is the start of a new creation as we open our hearts and our minds to Jesus. But we must be prepared to welcome him when he comes. Where are those places in our lives where we least expect to find Jesus? At home? At work? At school? In a club? In the waiting room of a doctor’s office, or a welfare office? Where have we lost all hope for a new creation? It is there, in those places, that the gospel for today proclaims that Jesus may just appear.”

The first reading today invites us to walk in God’s ways, to walk in the light of the Lord. The second reading invites us to lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armour of light. The gospel calls us to be ready to meet the Lord when he comes again. Paul’s letter to the Romans goes to the core of the matter – he asks us to “put on the Lord Jesus Christ.” So put on Christ, and be ready to meet Jesus in the most unexpected places. I would like to share a few ways that I have met Jesus unexpectedly.

One was during a workshop put on by the National Coalition Building Institute (NCBI). This organization was founded by a Jewish woman, Cherie Brown, who grew up in New York where she found herself constantly dealing with multi-cultural tensions and challenges. The skills she picked up naturally in that environment helped her to create an organization that now helps others deal with cultural, political and religious conflict. In creative and often surprising ways, the activities she put us through taught us to be more aware of our feelings; to trust the group and to communicate our thoughts and feelings in safe, respectful yet assertive ways. The sessions helped us become aware of our own prejudices, racism in ourselves and helped us understand where others were coming from – in short, to put on Christ.

Another surprising situation in which I believe I truly met Jesus at work in all of us was a 12 Step pilgrimage. We were put in small groups or families for sharing and dialogue after each presentation and got to know each other very well. A young girl opened up and trusted the group, something she had never done before. Another young adult was obviously hiding behind the mask of makeup and perfect dress (she was a fashion designer) and was literally transformed into her more genuine self by the second day. She was even able to dress in a more casual fashion that reflected her new freedom.

Another program that is now sweeping across Western Canada and helped me meet Jesus in new ways is the *Returning To Spirit* program, designed to help survivors of the Indian Residential School experience healing and move beyond victim-hood. This unique program taught us skills for more effective communication leading to reconciliation and forgiveness and the ability to love ourselves

and others more deeply. It taught me that a declaration must be part of an apology for that apology to be genuine and effective. It brought Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Church people together for a time of intense learning, sharing, healing and reconciliation – precisely what Jesus was all about.

I find that visiting people within the communities I served as a priest and now as a bishop, and sharing with my brother Oblates, are both places and times when I meet Jesus. I am challenged to love, listen, understand and accept. I am also inspired by the courage, heroism, patience, love, hospitality and generosity that I encounter. That helps me to put on Christ and be ready to meet him because I have met him in others. The saying that I found in my father's bible after he died is certainly true: "To be closer to God, be closer to others."

It's up to us. This Advent can be just another Sunday marking the beginning of another "business as usual" Church year, or it can be the beginning of a new creation, of a new year of enjoying the inner light and warmth of Christ living within and among us.

For Corbin Eddy, the end of the world and the beginning of this new creation comes in forms large and small for different people at different times, as God through the events of life, strips away certain presuppositions and assumptions about how things have been and are always going to be. Even elements that seem essential may be stripped away.

The Eucharist that we celebrate now is a meeting with Jesus through Word, community and Sacrament. May our celebration us to approach this Advent as a time of joyful preparation to see, recognize and experience the coming of Christ into our lives and our world in surprising situations.

So put on Christ, and be ready to meet Jesus in the most unexpected places.