Advent Sunday Year B 2014

A woman is awarded a divorce settlement of £337 million. Babies are punched by their 'parents' such that the pathologist likens the injuries to those arising from the baby having been thrown from the top of a tower block. People are so intent on getting the latest gadget or fashion that they trample on other shoppers. There are over 13000 slaves in the UK. The banks are bailed out by you and me, but they still overpay their bosses and refuse to serve our needs.

Let's get personal. I would love God to sort out those people who over the last three years in Ireland behaved so as to spoil our, and others', lives there. I would love God to do unspeakable things to those who maim babies and children. And more. Perhaps this is why stories of revenge (Shawshank) are so well received.

Drop down, ye heavens, from above, and pour down righteousness. Come like a tornado. *Stir up thy strength and come and help us. Wachet auf! Part the clouds, stretch out your hand. Sort out this mess.*

But hold on. The more I think of this image of us waiting for God to come and sort things out, the more disturbing it gets. It assumes that we are like children waiting for daddy and mammy to come and kiss it all better. Like so much religion, it makes infants of us. Surely, this can't be right: the point of Jesus' teaching is to help us grow up, not to make brainless nincompoops of us (though you often wouldn't think that).

Come and sort this place out. And so he did. He came down to earth from heaven. He shared our human life, so that we can share His divine life. *Admirabile commercium.* God becomes one of us, and we have power to become sons and daughters of God. We are his hands and feet and eyes and mouth and ears. We all have the divine spark, the light, within. God acts in this world through us. So rather than waiting for Daddy to come and sort things out, what are <u>we</u> going to do about it? You and me?

How are <u>we</u> going to deal with a corrupt economic system that enables hedge fund managers to amass 700 million? Or sportsmen who are paid more in a minute most people in the world earn in a year? Or dictators who brainwash their people? Or people—us—who are so besotted with being acquisitive that we trample on other shoppers to get the latest gadgets or fashions? And more and more. Shall we demonstrate? Shall we rebel? Shall we organize civil disobedience? How about a national day of prayer and fasting? Or several such days. It would do us no harm. Gandhi showed how effective that could be. How else can we make our feelings known?

The trouble is that it's not just about them—it's about us. *We* are part of *them*. *They* are part of *us*. We might well amass £700 million if we could. We're all addicted to bad behaviour of some description: holding on to power, greed, controlling others, booze, fags, complaining, gossiping, criticizing others, exercise, drugs, food. If you're from the prosperous end of society, such addictions are encouraged and rewarded. If you're not, they land you in trouble. But for all of us, these attachments steal our personalities, they change us, they eat away at us like caterpillars chomping leaves.

Come and save us. That ain't gonna happen until we acknowledge the depths of our own addictions and our own need for liberation. *Deliver us from evil.* Deliver us from the evil parts of ourselves. This has to start with ourselves. That is what Advent is for: making us ready. Look in a mirror. Let the infant Christ grow in us as it is growing in Mary.

'He was not idle all the time He was an embryo — all the nine months He was in the womb; but then and there He even eat out the core of corruption that cleft to our nature and us, and made both us and it an unpleasing object in the sight of God. …. [We] were by this means made beloved in Him … this the good by Christ an embryo.' (Lancelot Andrewes 1614)

Thus He in love to us behaved, To show us how we must be saved ; And if you want to know the way , Be pleased to hear what He did say.

The trouble is, we don't. Happy Advent.