

On December 4, 1959, the United Nations received a sculpture which can still be seen today in New York. It is of a man holding a hammer in one hand and a sword in the other. He is hammering the sword into a ploughshare. The gift, ironically, is from the Soviet Union, officially at the time an atheist nation yet it was inspired by today's reading from the Prophet Isaiah;

Neither shall they learn war any more.

In the ninth chapter of Isaiah, we read this prophecy: For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Today we begin a new Church Year, the Season of Advent where we focus on the two comings of Christ; at Christmas and at the end of time.

For the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.

Isaiah prophesied eight centuries before the birth of Jesus. We read from his book some twenty centuries after the birth of Jesus. It is evident today there are still too many swords and not enough ploughshares. Isaiah tells us of what God intends for the world; all nations and peoples gathering at God's holy mountain; humanity caring for one another and creation as it we were envisioned from the beginning. Jesus came to make that vision into a reality.

We are just weeks away from Christmas. There is no unexpected hour. We've known all too well that Christmas will be celebrated on December 25, as it has been for centuries. The Church, in its wisdom, gives us this season that tends to stand in contrast to what is for many a busy month; preparation, shopping, travel, get-togethers, noise, gift giving and receiving. Amongst it all is this short season of Advent, asking us to reflect, slow down, encounter, listen and welcome – the peace that only Jesus can bring.

It may seem strange talking about peace in the midst of a world that seems so far from it; in our own brokenness and division; in our pains and struggles. And yet Isaiah may be inviting us to consider the swords in our own lives – selfishness, fear, angst, self righteousness, unforgiveness – and the ways we can begin bending them into instruments of forgiveness, joy, harmony, sacrifice, love. How can we turn those means of destruction into implements of peace.

Mother Teresa once said; Jesus wants to tell you again and again just how much He loves you. It has been suggested that Advent is the opportunity to open ourselves up to Jesus. Now, many – if not all here have. But can we open up just a bit more; no matter how we are feeling on this weekend; with four weeks until Christmas.

This is a strange time of the year. Some people have been decorating since Thanksgiving, ensuring every square inch of where they live is filled with something Christmas; and others won't have a single decoration, and many in between. Some will host a huge gathering, others will be alone, and many in between. Some have looked forward to Christmas since before we celebrated Easter, others dread it, and many in between. No matter where we are at as we begin this Advent season, Jesus wants to bring peace to our world, Church, parish, our families, our souls, by bending swords into ploughshares.

He will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Jesus wants to tell you again and again just how much He loves you.