

It's not unusual for athletes nowadays to focus a lot on their mental approach to an event. Jack Nicklaus, the iconic American Golfer, may have been the first. One time this became obvious was when he was seen on camera standing over the ball for 30 seconds and suddenly backing away, audibly saying 'wrong swing'. He hadn't even touched the ball, much to the puzzlement of TV commentators. What did he mean? He explained afterwards that he approached each shot like a movie of three parts. The first part was where he wanted the ball to land; the second movie was of the ball in the air, and its flight path – straight or curving; the third part was the swing. And, as he explained, he then realised he had the wrong swing and needed to re-think the shot!

Advent has four Sunday and is a bit of a mental rehearsal as well. Today we see the pink or rose candle on the Advent wreath, reminding us that there are only ten days remaining to Christ-Mass (the original term). Together all these candles provide a flickering crescendo of hope in an increasingly dark world. Taking the Nicklaus Golf shot approach – we know what kind of Christmas Day we want; we can even visualise how we can make that happen – but is our approach all wrong, a bit like Nicklaus' swing on that occasion? Maybe we need to



figure out a different way. They say that the definition of madness is to do the exact same thing- yet expect a different result.

Advent does have a role to play in helping people understand the Christian meaning of Christmas but, after 34 years of Advent preaching, I'm wondering if people zone out spiritually in favour of the secular side of things! But I think of poor old Paul in Rome, chained to a brutish soldier (what was meant literally by house-arrest), writing the second reading for today... about happiness. Don't we have it so good in comparison? The Christian message of Christmas is that 'on those living in a world of deep darkness a light has dawned.' There is lots to look forward to. Preparedness is everything.

Preparedness, as in today's Gospel, is also remarkably practical.

We celebrate the coming of Christ three ways as well: historically, sacramentally and at the end of time. Historically at Christmas, of course, sacramentally in the form of his Body and Blood and at the end of time when he will come again in glory. We need to make sure our approach to this is right. As they say in Cinema world, 'Lights...Camera... Action!'

– Tom Cox

The peace of the Lord be with you always.
And with your spirit.

As the priest breaks the consecrated Host the following is sung or said:

Lamb of God, you take away the sins ...

Showing the Eucharist to the people, the priest says:
Behold the Lamb of God, ...

**Lord, I am not worthy
that you should enter under my roof,
but only say the word
and my soul shall be healed.**

Communion Antiphon (Cf. Is 35:4)
Say to the faint of heart:

**Be strong and do not fear.
Behold, our God will come,
and he will save us.**

Prayer after Communion

We implore your mercy, Lord,
that this divine sustenance may cleanse us of
our faults
and prepare us for the coming feasts.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Reflection

What am I doing to bring Joy, not pain, to those I love and to all those who share this common home, our planet Earth, with me?

Lesson

Joy is a gift of the Holy Spirit that is one of the marks of being a faithful Christian.

Prayer

Lord, let me learn to place myself in your hands, to be guided by the Spirit, so that I will be a faithful witness to you.