

First Sunday in Advent

“For you do not know on which day your Lord will come...you must be prepared, for at an hour you do not expect, the Son of Man will come.” Matthew 24, 37-44

Life Chronicles is a volunteer organization in North America which makes video recordings for people who find they have life-threatening illnesses or expect to be separated from family and friends for extended periods. Established in the late 1990s, Life Chronicles assists terminally ill people to record interviews, stories and memories for their families. Volunteers with the organization also help people diagnosed with early dementia to record messages for their loved ones. Men and women of the armed forces who receive lengthy postings to war zones are also invited to record messages for family before they leave for active duty. Their recordings are then made available to those left behind to play whenever they wish.

Karyn was a dedicated mother of two children - Brendan, 7 and Maggie, 4. For her, the highlight of each day was to spend time reading and singing to them. Four years ago, Karyn was diagnosed with breast cancer. She underwent a rigorous programme of chemotherapy, but at the start of this year was informed by her oncologist that the treatment had been unsuccessful. With the help of Life Chronicles, Karyn and her husband, Jeff, got together with the two children and announced that they were going to make a video together. While the children understood that their mother was sick, they did not appreciate that she was soon to die. So they entered into the video-making with lots of excitement. For about an hour and a half they read stories together and sang favourite family songs. They also shared stories and memories of family events and holidays they had enjoyed together. Both Karyn and Jeff made a point of telling the child how much they loved them and each other. When the children had gone, Karyn and Jeff recorded the story of how they first met, fell in love and eventually married. Karen went on to add that she wanted the children to have more than just pictures of her. She wanted them to have recorded memories of how happy they had been as a family.

The liturgy of this first Sunday in Advent urges us to “stay awake” so that we don’t miss the interventions of God in our lives. If we are sufficiently alert, we begin to realize that God is present in all the events and interactions of our day. Karyn and Jeff somehow realized that Life Chronicles offered them the opportunity to capture memories of the graced moments in the life of their family.

Advent is presented to us as a time of waiting for God to come into our lives, as a time of expectation that God *will* come into our lives - in the actual birth of Jesus which we celebrate at Christmas and in all those ordinary events of life in which we encounter the divine.

Traumatic as they have been, the recent mining accidents in Chile and New Zealand have mirrored something of the “waiting in hope” which we all experience at different times because of circumstances beyond our control. Advent invites us to reflect on all the events which touch our lives and to recognize God present in them.

As people who put our faith in God, we live in the hope that we will one day find healing, wholeness and completion in God. While our waiting may, at times, be soul-searing, terrifying and emotionally draining, we live in the hope that God, through Jesus, will enable us to find lasting peace and healing at the end of the waiting.