

Our society today has a real problem with *waiting*. The British used to be known throughout the world for forming a queue and waiting their turn. Now it's elbows out and push on to the front. Mothers think that a pram and a baby give them the right to push everyone off the pavement, and they don't even look at you as they shove you into the gutter because they're too busy yakking away on their mobiles. On the road we have road rage where people think that their business is always more pressing than yours. We all seem to be in a hurry these days and coming across courtesy on the road has become a rare bright spot in our day.

It's as though we haven't grown up, isn't it, because it's children who can't wait. Remember the days when you took the children on a car journey and after only half an hour they were whining from the back, 'Are we there yet, Dad?' Of course today we put TV screens in the back to keep them entertained, but is that really such a good idea? We are not teaching our children that they have to learn to wait, 'to thole', as the Scots and Ulster folk say. We are encouraging children to expect that we are here simply to entertain them. They expect school to entertain them. Children should be made to sit through my sermons and to grind their way through Virgil and Homer to realise that life is nine parts boredom and one part fear. We are encouraging our children *not* to wait.

And this has been catastrophic. When they get married they think that their partner is there simply to amuse them. When they start to bore them, it's time to dump them. And how did we get into this dreadful financial mess, which events in

Ireland have shewn, is only just beginning? It is all because of debt - government and personal debt. And how does debt come about? From people spending what they haven't got. And how does that come about? Because people won't wait until they have saved up for the car, three-piece suite, plasma TV. Spend now, save later. Get it on the credit card. This is the way consumerism works, and I have always said that today's religion is consumerism. Spend, spend, spend to make yourselves happy and fulfilled. Well, this false god is leading us slowly but surely to disaster and heartache.

People won't wait. We want a quick fix. I want to be able to speak French in a fortnight; to be a fantastic pianist after only a few lessons. I want to be happy without cultivating inner habits. The quick fix to happiness is get drunk or get high on drugs. The quick fix to making a better society is violent revolution. Let's not wait. Let's just string up all the old politicians and purge the nation.

And that brings us to a real problem for us Christians. If God is good, and if he is all powerful, why is the world in such a terrible mess? If Jesus is supposed to have conquered the world, why does he seem to have made so little difference? I think we all feel, as we look at the world, that this is not the way things should be in life. We know we are not complete. Surely there is something more? Well, if we read our Bibles, we would soon realise that there is a whole book, the last book of the Bible devoted to this very question, the Book of Revelation. That book is about God revealing to us his final plans for the future. What we see around us at the moment is

not the way things will always be. God has not finished with us yet. This Advent Sunday we celebrate the coming of God in Christ to do something about this fallen, rebellious, sinful world. But that first coming of his light into this dark world is not the end of the story. *Revelation* reveals to us that this same Jesus Christ will come again and finally destroy the devil and all his works which are mucking up God's good creation. One day in the future Christ will come again, unexpectedly like a thief in the night, and destroy sin, death, tears and pain. One day there will be a new heaven and a new earth.

But meantime we have to *wait*. At the moment we live in in-between times. The old sinful, God-resisting age is still with us, and the new age is yet to come fully. That new age has partially come in Christ, but we must wait for it to come in all its fullness. Of course we are impatient. Why does God not hurry up and do away with all the evil and sadness in the world? But it's the old story, isn't it, of the children in the back of the car: 'Are we there yet, Dad?' We haven't learned to wait, and to live in God's time.

Today we celebrate the life of St Andrew. He was clearly a seeker. He was looking for a better way, even 2000 years ago. First he had followed John the Baptist. But when he saw Jesus, he realised that this was the real thing. What was the first thing he did? It was to bring his brother Simon to Christ. Andrew was just like us. He knew the world was wrong. He could so easily have joined some revolutionary party to sweep away the old, rotten ways and bring in a new order.

That's what they did in 1789 in France. By violence, by guillotining the leaders of the old corrupt regime - the king, the aristos and clergy - they thought they were hastening the new and better age. Of course, looking back we know that they weren't. The new age was just as corrupt as the old, because we sinful human beings are part of the problem, not part of the solution. But they couldn't wait. They had to take things into their own hands.

St Andrew cared just as much about a better world as the revolutionaries of France, but he was prepared to wait. Instead of taking things into his own hands, he put them into the hands of Christ. His great act was to bring his brother Simon to Christ, and that Simon became St Peter the mighty apostle.

We Christians need to remind ourselves that God still has the whole world in his hands. He knows what is going on here, and he has a plan, one day, to get rid of all the evil and injustice and pain. One day Christ will come again and there will be a new heaven and a new earth where there will be no more death or pain or tears. Our calling is to trust God in this, and to live in *his* time, and not in ours - in other words, to *wait!* As we rejoice at Christ's first Advent, let us pray for his *second* coming. Lord, quickly come, Maranatha.

This is the basis of our Christian hope. God knows, God cares, and God is able. He has a plan The present reality might be grim, but the future is bright, for 'soon, and very soon, we are going to see the King'. AMEN!