

I don't know whether you noticed it but last Friday was listed as Black Friday. It was a day on which people came up from the country to do their Christmas shopping in Dublin. It is that time of year already – a number of stores had special offers on electrical and household items – all with the idea of getting ready for Christmas.

But there is so much to do, so many deadlines – deadlines for cards, deadlines for parcels, deadlines for on-line shopping. Then there are the preparations for Christmas dinner, presents to get – what do you get the elderly uncle who seems to have everything – the food for Christmas dinner, the tree, the decorations. So little time left, so much to do

Maybe that is a bit of a parody – but in all the busyness of the run up to Christmas there is an emphasis on doing, upon deadlines. Advent, the season we have just entered upon, has by contrast an emphasis upon waiting, upon watching, upon responding. I want to just remain with that contrast between the busyness of this time of the year and the patience of Advent..

Our Gospel reading this morning from Mark's Gospel, continues the theme we have been following for the past number of weeks of waiting, of anticipation. our passage ends with an injunction to keep awake. The word used here has connotations of not just not being asleep, but of alertness, of being attentive. It contains a lovely illustration of attentiveness, the sort of watchfulness to stop whatever else we are doing and to look.

²⁸From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near

This morning Connor and Beckie are bringing their little girl Isobelle for Baptism, just as Beckie's parents brought her in time past to this same church.

Connor and Beckie will have already learned the importance of attentiveness in their rearing of Isobelle. At night you are alert for the sound of her cry – you learn to distinguish between a cry of distress and what we would have called a grumpy cry. You are alert for the signs of teeth coming, of sickness. With your health visitor you will look out for signs of development, when she started to sit up, when she will start walking, talking. Then as she grows up you will watch, you will be attentive to her particular gifts, watching for signs of particular talents to encourage, to help her develop.

Of course as parents we will do lots of things for our children, but doing is not enough – there must be that patient watching, a discernment to our parenting.

In the introduction to the Service of Baptism, Baptism is described as marking ‘the beginning of a journey which lasts for the rest of our lives.’ At this point of embarkation on this lifelong journey, the child’s parents undertake to care for their child and to help her take her place within the life and worship of the Church. A fundamental part of that is encouraging her to recognise the place of God in her life. For a child to do that, the child has to see the parents doing that in the priorities they set in their own life together, in the values they adopt in their life together as a family, in the priority they give to their own part in the life and worship of the Church.

I just want to bring these thoughts of watching, of discernment back into our thoughts on Advent.