This year, I've spent a lot of time doing classroom visits with our Prep, Year 1, 2 and 3 students. As all parents know, there are remarkable growth stages between each year level as children slowly learn to listen attentively to the sound of their teacher's voice and apply themselves to learning. Prep students, for example, learn to focus their attention through ***sung*** instructions like ***"Stop, Look and Listen***"…. ***"We are listening."*** In the early years, teachers use other simple call-and-response jingles—***"One, two, three, eyes on me,"*** to which the children reply, ***"One, two, eyes on you."*** With consistent practice, the teacher does less and less to draw the students attention—especially when the teacher can ignite within a child the desire to learn.

As a student myself, I didn't have that desire. In fact, I didn't even realise that I didn't have it. I did what was required to get through most classes, but no more… For many years, ***my faith life looked similar***. Mass was something we did as a family out of obligation. Prayer was simply the words we said, hoping God might be listening. It was like turning up to school each day, doing what was written on the board, without ever realising that there was a teacher in the room longing to help me grow. That began to change only when, through the witness of others and through prayer, I slowly discovered that Jesus does indeed have a voice—and that I ***could*** learn to recognise it. When I realised that I actually had something to learn from him, a spark was lit in my faith.

Our readings today offer a contrast between those whose faith spark has been awakened and those who go through the motions. Isaiah's vision paints a picture of streams of people moving toward the Lord—not as isolated individuals, but as a community with

hearts open and eager. They cry out, “Let us go to the Lord; that he may ***teach*** us his ways so that we may ***walk*** in his paths.” These are people who know they are not yet who God is inviting them to be. They are ready to be taught. Their faith spark is already alight.

Like schoolchildren learning how to listen, all of us—whether we realise it or not—are on a journey of learning how to listen to the Lord. In my own experience, and in the experience of many parishioners who have shared with me, curiosity about God’s voice—combined with consistent, daily, personal prayer—leads to a growing capacity to recognise ***moments*** of pure gift. These ***moments***, often called ***Encounters***, are the times when God’s presence becomes deeply personal and real… a single word or line from Scripture seems to speak directly to your heart; the beauty of creation moves you in an unexpected and joyful way; a conversation touches you with unusual depth; a sudden interior warmth or peace washes over you… And slowly that small spark of faith grows into a steady flame, and then into a furnace of desire for the Lord.

But today’s Gospel gives us the other side: people who are spiritually asleep, deaf to God’s voice. In the days of Noah, people lived their lives—eating, drinking, marrying—completely unaware of God’s presence and invitation. They noticed nothing until the flood came. Noah, by contrast, heard God’s voice. He listened. And then he acted.

Jesus uses the same contrast in the Gospel: two men in the field, two women grinding flour. One is awake to God; one is not. One’s heart responds; the other remains distracted. And this brings us to the invitation of Advent—a season that urges us to stay awake, to

be attentive, to listen, because we do not know the day when our Lord will come. Yes, we ***celebrate*** his coming in ***history*** at Bethlehem. Yes, we look ***ahead*** to his coming in ***majesty*** at the end of time. But we often ***miss*** his coming in the ***mystery*** of the present moment. And this "present coming" is the one that can transform us ***right now***—if we're paying attention.

How does God get our attention? The primary pathway is prayer: ***daily, personal, private prayer*** in ***stillness, silence, solitude, and with Scripture***. Prayer is not about saying the perfect words. It's about placing ourselves in God's presence long enough and quietly enough that we begin to notice that he is already speaking. When we choose to pray, we begin to allow the layers of armour around our hearts to soften. A word or phrase from Scripture stands out. A surprising moment of gratitude rises within us. A surge of peace or joy suddenly appears. These are not random. They are traces of the risen Jesus breaking into the ordinary fabric of our lives.

And so, friends, the Teacher is indeed in the room. He is already present. He is already speaking. And he is waiting for our attention. This Advent, may we commit—even in the smallest and simplest way—to giving him our attention. Even five minutes reading the daily Gospel each morning, or a quiet time of stillness in the evening can open our hearts to a grace we did not know we were missing. May we stay awake. May we listen closely. And may the Lord who comes to us in history and in majesty also come to us deeply, personally, and powerfully in the mystery of the present moment. Amen.