

Homily for the 2nd Sunday of Advent 2023 Year B

Today is the 2nd Sunday of Advent, that special season in the life of the Church, when we are preparing for the celebration of Christmas, God's coming as Man to man.

The Gospel today introduces us to the figure of John the Baptist, a great prophet and chosen messenger, whose role was to prepare the way for Christ's arrival.

The brief descriptions that we have of John show him to be an extraordinary character. He came out of the solitude of the desert and captured the imagination of the people. They flocked to hear him announcing that the long-awaited day of salvation was about to dawn upon them. He didn't mince his words; they stung like the lash of a whip as he reprimanded his listeners for their loose lifestyles which were making them careless and apathetic.

They were not ready for this Advent, this Coming.

His message was simple but powerful, "Do penance and reform your lives by prayer and fasting, for the Kingdom of God is at hand."

That same voice of John the Baptist speaks to us across the ages and urges us likewise to prepare a place for the Lord in our hearts.

Advent therefore is an invitation to Conversion and John gives some very down to earth advice on how to change our lives for the better.

Linked to the themes of the Prophet Isaiah he spoke of filling in valleys, but what valleys? Perhaps the valleys of prejudice, or the many sins of omission; the good we meant to do but never got around to doing; our neglect of family and neighbours and those wasted opportunities in life for helping others; those mountains of our pride that can only be levelled out by the daily practice of the virtue of humility.

He spoke of straightening out crooked paths. What crooked paths? Perhaps the crooked paths of injustice and self-deceit.

Let us ask ourselves today, in the privacy of our hearts, what perhaps is there in our lives that needs a radical and complete turnaround to allow God to come closer to us. In all our lives there are perhaps these little dark areas and corners of ourselves which we do not want disturbed, even though we are aware that they prevent God from entering our inner-most being.

Advent is therefore the Church's gift to us, the opportunity when, through prayer and penance, we can make a fresh start to prevent spiritual drift.

How do we go about it?

Well for a start, we must realize that it is a time consuming and costly business. It demands listening to what God is saying to us and, if necessary, acting upon it by making changes in our way of life. Welcoming God involves removing all those blockages, twists, turns and obstacles which prevent Him from coming closer to us. Preparing a way for the Lord may mean walking a new path and putting the old ways behind us.

Christ cannot come to us and save us without our co-operation and our will. Like a true gentleman he does not force entry to our lives, but he waits to be invited.

The figure of John the Baptist also reminds us that we too have the task of announcing Christ to others. We do not shout from the roof tops, we do it instead by the quiet example of our lives.

We may be the only book about Christ which most people will ever read. It is in those quiet lives of kindness, honesty, and faithfulness whereby we show that Christ is right there with us.