

Fr James' homily for The Second Sunday of Advent 2020

First Reading: Isaiah 40: 1-11
Second Reading: Second Letter of St Peter 3:8-14
Gospel: Mark 1:18



“By praying we change reality, and we change our hearts”... so says Pope Francis in making his prayer intention for December prayer itself. At the start of a new year for the life of faith, and as we listen today to the start of the Gospel of St Mark, it is worthwhile reminding ourselves of our constant need to re-start our spiritual life and life of faith.

Just by praying a basic Advent prayer: “Come, Lord Jesus” we are opening ourselves to new possibilities, and acknowledging a fundamental spiritual truth: that God is not passively waiting for us to find our way to him, but actively pursuing us, if we would only let him in. (The truth of God’s plans for salvation we celebrate next week in the Immaculate Conception of Mary, and of course Advent itself prepares us for the mystery of Christmas, of God-with-us in the birth of Jesus). St Peter today (second reading) exhorts us to remember this: that God is not like us but is faithful and constant and waiting for us NOT to earn his love, but to be open to the change his love brings. His love is freely given.

St Mark begins his Gospel not with the build up to the birth of Jesus as is told in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, but with the dramatic appearance of John the Baptist and his call to conversion of life. It is Gospel - that is to say Good News - that God intends to fill us with the power and grace of his Holy Spirit, or in other words to bring us fully to life. For this to happen, we must be receptive, and not full of anything else. We cannot earn God’s love, or come to him by our own achievement, but we have to set about the necessary and appropriate preparation for his coming to us. You have to want it. “Come, Lord Jesus.”

Just as the prophet Isaiah (first reading) yearned for all the hills and valleys that lay between the exiled people of Israel and their homeland to be levelled and out of the way, so John the Baptist calls to us through the ages to want the same, for the very wanting opens the door to God’s grace and allows him to help us. I run the risk here of mixing many metaphors as the scriptures give us so many images of God’s purposes. Let us just think of the idea of clearing the ground, as you clear it of weeds or obstacles, as you might make a clearing for the emergency helicopter to land.

So, in Advent, even as the onslaught of TV advertisements pressures us to acquire lots of stuff, it is time for us to pray honestly: what needs clearing away; what needs, alternatively, building up?? Above all perhaps we all need to fill in that valley of

indifference to God and our spiritual sense of entitlement. Here are simple ways to proceed:

- Treasure our ability to come to church and add our prayers to Mass.
- Make a visit to the Blessed Sacrament with our prayers for all causes.
- Make an Examination of Conscience and come to Reconciliation.
- Review how we are engaging in the works of mercy.
- Do something voluntary.

None of these things is a plan for meriting the love of God or earning heaven. We can't do that. Our Advent is an exercise in allowing God a chance to work in us. As we lessen our attachments to what passes away, we allow God to attach to us his grace, so that as Isaiah says (first reading), in yet another image that Jesus will make his own:

“He is like a shepherd feeding his flock, gathering lambs in his arms, holding them against his breast...”

Alleluia, Come Lord Jesus!

Amen.

Fr James and Fr Tom wish you a blessed Sunday. Keep safe and well, and never hesitate to pick up the telephone and be in touch. See you in church I hope! Keep in close contact with the website for news of how practical plans are developing.