

Homily at Mass 1st Sunday of Advent Year C – 2 December 2018

At the end of time, God will create a new heaven and a new earth. Evil will no longer have any power or attractiveness. The redeemed will stand face to face with God – as his friends. Their yearning for peace and justice will be fulfilled. To behold God will be their blessedness. The Triune God will dwell among them and wipe away every tear from their eyes; there will be no more death, sorrow, lamentation, or trouble. (YOUCAT n. 164).

That's how the Church's Catechism for young people YOUCAT describes all that awaits the human race at the end of time. Jesus uses more dramatic language and images – “signs in the sun, moon and stars ... nations in agony... Men dying of fear ... the powers of heaven will be shaken”. We could add to that list some terrible and shocking things that have occurred in Australia in recent days: 100+ fires burning all over Queensland during an incredible heatwave; huge dust storms in NSW, and during the week a month's worth of rain in one day, causing floods on the streets of Sydney, destruction and 2 or 3 deaths. Who of us will forget the incessant rain in Melbourne on Cup Day?

As well as unusual weather, which some might like to call “climate change”, we also see dramatic changes in social morality especially in western societies. Newspapers this week carried reports from the Australian Bureau of Statistics on marriage in Australia. Since last year's postal vote on same sex marriage, about 3,000 same sex couples have contracted marriage. The average age for marriage continues to become older, and Victoria has the largest number of divorces in Australia. A meeting of priests this week was told about how so many young people are exposed to pornography, in some instances from the age of 13. These are some signs that we are living in a post – Christian world.

But today, Jesus shouts out a word that gives us fresh heart, and even hope on this 1st Sunday of Advent. “Your liberation is near at hand”. What a word liberation is – it breathes hope and joy; liberation – liberty – freedom.

Freedom is the greatest aspiration of every person alive. Oh, to be free from worry and fear. Oh, to be free from sickness, bad health, family troubles. Oh, to be free from fear of criticism and misunderstanding. Oh, even to be free from paying the bills! One commentator reckons that most people want to be free from the inevitability of death, the burden of moral responsibility from actions and choices, and how we feel ourselves weighed down by guilt, as well as those things that can frustrate daily life – political oppression, social pressures. Australian politicians seem to be juggling how religious freedom and freedom of speech can be held together. All Australians want to live in safety. Australian Christians want to continue to enjoy freedom of worship for themselves and everyone else. Australian Catholics want to maintain freedom to run our schools and hospitals as we want to. None of us want our freedom to live and enjoy life in peace and harmony to be curtailed or to be limited or taken away.

“Your liberation is at hand” Jesus proclaims today. We find these words of Jesus at the tail end of St Luke's Gospel. Advent focuses us first of all at the end of time, before we begin to prepare for the great feast of Christmas. St Luke's account of our Lord's Holy Week – his death and resurrection - begins just after today's Gospel passage. This helps us to think about the liberation Jesus is speaking of. It is liberation that he gives us by his Cross – liberation, freedom from sin; liberation, freedom as sons and daughters of God; liberation, freedom to live a life that is, in the words of St Irenaeus of Lyons (2nd century), freedom to be “fully human, fully alive”.

‘Joy’ is a word that appears often in the prayers and songs of Advent. It is a joyful season, Christmas Day draws nearer, we celebrate end of year events at work and in the different groups that we are part of, we think of others, we write out Christmas cards and send messages, we look forward to family get-togethers, gifts, summer holidays.

As faithful Christians, we use Advent to prepare for Christmas. We can't escape the commercial side of Christmas but we know, as one Prep child at St Anthony's School told his mum and dad when he got home on Friday, "Christmas is the birthday of Jesus". You and I also understand that to celebrate Christmas well we need to feel the liberation, freedom, healing and joy that Jesus alone gives in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Our Parish bulletin today includes a list of Confession times between now and Christmas Eve. Let's use the opportunity Advent gives us to "prepare for the way of the Lord".

"Your liberation is near at hand".