

2nd Sunday Advent (B)

- What a year we've had! Who would have thought at the beginning of 2020 that the ways we have lived & the ways we have taken for granted the things we do – how we study, how we work, how we relate to one another, how governments rule – have all been upended, & life will never be the same, because of COVID-19.
- 2020 is the year of global change & probably the ways different countries have dealt with the Coronavirus have shown up the strengths or the weaknesses of the governance of these countries.
- The numerous demonstrations, protests & riots around the world this year are indicative also that people in Hong Kong, the US, Belarus, Thailand, Indonesia & so many more, are demanding change in the ways they are governed.
- 2020 is a year when people are also demanding change in the way they are governed, as corrupt, racist, self-serving leaders are being held to account by their people.
- I recently read a poem by a freelance writer, Leslie Wright, who challenged the notion of the frightfulness of this year, & the wish that 2020 was cancelled. She wrote:
- *"What if 2020 isn't cancelled? What if 2020 is the year we've been waiting for? A year so uncomfortable, so painful, so scary, so raw – that it finally **forces** us to grow. A year that screams so loud, finally awakening us from our ignorant slumber. A year we finally accept the need for change. Declare change. Work for change. Become the change. A year we finally band together, instead of pushing each other further apart. 2020 isn't cancelled, but rather the most important year of them all."*
- Today's Gospel portrays yet another prophet in a long line of prophets through the Old Testament who protested for change.
- John the Baptist talked about change that was certainly coming.
- As he saw it, for change to take place, it was people who had to change.
- If there is going to be no more war, then people need to stop hating others; if there is going to be charity & care for others, then people need to look inside their hearts & draw on the justice of God that resides there; if there is going to be change, then people need to change.
- That is the only change which is really possible.
- "Prepare for the Lord," John the Baptist proclaims in the Gospel for this Second Sunday of Advent - Prepare for the Lord by preparing yourselves.
- And the people from throughout the Judean countryside & the inhabitants of Jerusalem went out to the Jordan River where John was preaching.
- And they confessed their sins. They were honest with themselves. And they were baptized. And the change had begun.
- We all want our country & our world to be better & safer place to live.

- We all want & wait for a vaccine for the Coronavirus; a cure for cancer & malnutrition & every disease or condition that is killing people; we all want an end to violence which takes place in too many places throughout the world; we all want peace; but what are we doing about it?
- The heart of John the Baptist's message is that if we want change, if we really want the One who will reform the world & return humanity to God's original plan, then **we** need to change.
- This is tough. It is just so much easier to sit back & expect the government to change, the world to change, other people to change.
- But if we really want change we can believe in, then **we** need to change.
- The Gospel is calling us to look at ourselves.
- Perhaps someone has mistreated us; we were innocent, & that person attacked us. Maybe it was a parent who constantly belittled us.
- Maybe it was someone at work or at school who really enjoyed making our life difficult; perhaps it was someone we barely knew, who took it upon himself or herself to berate us, treated us with disrespect.
- How have we responded?
- Sadly, many times we respond by matching nastiness with nastiness.
- How can we expect there to be peace in the world, when we respond to hate with hate? If we want the world to change, we need to change.
- We may want our economic situation in the world to change; that poverty in the world is eliminated, but what is our attitude to money.
- Our determination to reform ourselves, to change ourselves so that we can change the world is not merely based on humanitarian needs, but is based on the spiritual. We belong to Jesus Christ. We are His People.
- He has called us to make His Presence real throughout the world.
- For us, love is not merely the opposite of hate - Love is the Presence of Jesus Christ within us & among us.
- For us charity is not just the opposite of greed - Charity is God working through us to care for others.
- Every year we can go on about how so much of our society is trying to destroy the original meaning of Christmas.
- We decry the use of the terms "Holiday Season or Seasons Greetings."
- And we should; we are saddened that a spiritual celebration has been transformed into a series of drinking parties. And we should be.
- But, perhaps, we should all be less concerned with the commercialization of Christmas & the debasement of Christmas from the birth of a poor child in a stable to the celebration of materialism, & be more concerned about what we are doing to Prepare the world for Jesus Christ.
- What John the Baptist is telling us is to look within; change our own attitudes, & then trust God to allow this change to have a part in the transformation the world.

- Effective change will only take place if we are the ones who change.
- We are invited to ask ourselves: What changes must I make in my life if I am going to respond to Jesus' call? What do I have to do differently?
- Are there ways of behaving that I have to leave behind?
- Do I have habits of self-gratification that keep distracting me from what I most desire; that get in the way of important loves in my life; that trip me up & distract me?
- We could well heed the maxim: 'carpe diem' ('seize the day') – not in order to get maximum satisfaction but in order to draw on the grace that God is offering us so that we will harness all our energies of love & do our part in carrying on the mission of Jesus, to build a 'civilisation of love.'
- That is what it means to 'Prepare for the Lord'.