

## 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday Advent (C)

- One of the great joys & rewards of loving another person is being able to give ourselves to the one we love - & there is a wonderful peace & trusting surrender when we can do this simply & happily & without reserve.
- God is love & so, to speak in human terms, God needs to give.
- God created the universe so that he could embrace it with love.
- That's why he made us. But, something got in the road. We call it sin.
- It is part of the human condition & it comes from our origins, so we traditionally call it 'Original Sin'.
- We inherit it from our ancestors & so each of us has our own special mix of it – different tendencies & addictions & impulses that draw our hearts away from the love for which we are made.
- It forms a kind of environmental sludge that none of us can avoid & it is not long before we add our own personal 'stuff' & sins to it.
- It's a bit like an oil slick that clogs up the wings of a sea bird.
- The bird is fine. It is beautiful & is made to soar, but the sludge can make it very difficult, at times impossible, to do what it so longs to do & what it's created for.
- We are made to be embraced by God & by the whole of creation, but we can feel quite trapped & weighed down, sometimes because of our own sin, but often because the sin that is part of the human condition makes it so hard to fly, so hard to breathe, so hard to love, so hard to live freely.
- Throughout Advent the Church offers for our reflection, poem after poem from the Old Testament.
- From their experience of God, the writers know that God longs to free them from the bondage of sin & its debilitating effects.
- This is where today's readings come in - both the First Reading & the Psalm speak of the wonder of being released from slavery to truly live.
- Do we have to be like John the Baptist, eccentrically dressed & scavenging for food, to prepare the way of the Lord? No.
- You & I are called to be a John or Joan the Baptist, preparing people's hearts in our own time & place.
- But we have to allow God to prepare *our* hearts for this role.
- John the Baptist challenges us to 'Repent', i.e. to turn around our own lives seeking God's forgiveness.
- And so, John the Baptist's call – "Prepare a way for the Lord, make his paths straight" is not Christ's paths he is speaking of, but ours that need to be straightened.
- We let misunderstandings with family members, colleagues & friends run on from year to year, meaning to clear them up some day, but never actually do.

- We keep quarrels alive because we cannot quite make up our minds to sacrifice our pride to end them.
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- John then challenges us to see the big picture which is that 'All who live shall see the salvation of God'.
- Pope Francis is the exemplary universal pastor inspiring us to become 'les mercifuls sans frontieres' & young people through social media are already saying 'We are one community of human beings on this fragile planet'.
- The challenge for most of us is more immediate & apparently of smaller scope.
- The challenge this Advent is to identify the one person whose heart you can help prepare to celebrate the coming of the Lord Jesus in three weeks' time. The best method is to let that person see your faith & joy centred on that little Jewish baby lying in a manger.
- Do that, & who knows what may happen because that little baby is in fact the Sovereign Lord of history & of the whole cosmos.
- With God's grace, you don't have to be as eccentric or bizarre as John the Baptist to play your part in changing the course of history!
- We could take a moment to pray that, repenting of our own sins where necessary, we may prepare the heart of at least one person so that the Lord Jesus may enter in this Christmas, helping him fulfil his mission that all who live shall see the salvation of God.
- If there is any hesitation, it comes from us – that's why we pray in today's Prayer: 'Remove the things that hinder us from receiving Christ with joy'.
- At Christmas God comes to us individually, as families, as a church, & to the whole world, in the simple, disarming form of a new-born babe.
- We all know the healing that the birth of a child can bring – how it can stop us in our tracks & change us.
- The grace of Christmas is the offer to each of us of a whole new beginning of hope.
- If we are not longing for him & expecting him the way parents expect a child, & if we are not feeling the thirst of our hearts for him, Christmas will be a time when we are caught up in all the busy-ness & glitz, & have no time for prayer, to slow down & reflect & no opportunity to quench the thirst of our spirits.
- Longing & waiting patiently is important, but there are also things that have to be done.
- As the Gospel reminds us, areas of our life that are empty have to be filled up; & other areas that have received too much attention have to be flattened out - there can be a lot to be put into order.
- If we find ourselves walking on a winding path, it will have to be straightened, & rough roads will need to be smoothed.

- I am sure that each of us can find examples of the 'winding paths & rough roads' in our own lives.
- In the opening prayer for this Mass we said, "God of power & mercy, open our hearts in welcome. Remove the things that hinder us from receiving Christ with joy."
- When we are called to 'Prepare a way for the Lord' it is a call to prepare a way in our own hearts – to break down the barriers that we have put up; to clear the obstacles that we have placed in the path.
- God's love will find a way! We simply make the way easier for ourselves to recognise God's love if we 'Prepare a way'.