

3rd SUNDAY ADVENT (B)

- There is a spirit of joyful anticipation in the first two readings of today's Mass, with both the prophet, Isaiah, & Paul calling on the people to rejoice.
- The First Reading takes up the theme of the good news of last week's readings, directing the message of optimism to specific people: the afflicted, the brokenhearted, the captive, those in prison.
- These words of promise become fully realised in the person of Jesus Christ; when he first preaches in the synagogue, he reads the first two verses from Isaiah & applies them to himself.
- 'Today this scripture is being fulfilled in your hearing'.
- When John the Baptist sends his disciples to ask Jesus whether he is 'the one', he answers 'Go & tell John what you have seen & heard'.
- We know **who** Jesus is by what he says & what he does.
- The question of identity is taken up in the Gospel Reading.
- This time, John the Baptist is faced with the questions: 'Who are you? ... What do you say about yourself?'
- He rejects titles others give him: the Christ, Elijah, the prophet, & identifies himself through his relationship with Jesus.
- He prepares the way for the Messiah, but claims that he is not worthy to even untie his sandal.
- John doesn't identify himself with the religious authority – he not someone who represents the Temple, but like all other authentic prophets before him, he identifies himself by his relationship with God, & in this case, more particularly with Jesus.
- His relationship with Jesus Christ is his identity; he is presented as a 'witness'.
- Rather than acting as something of a herald, as in last week's account, here John the Baptist is witnessing 'to speak for the light'.
- He makes a very clear distinction between himself & the Christ, his mission is simply to point towards the light; the Christ.
- Our common understanding of the word 'witness' tends to be related to legal situations: providing a witness statement or acting as a witness to a fact in court.
- The use of witness in this gospel carries a different connotation: to provide witness through action & lifestyle that draws others to wonder about & perhaps come to accept the motivating belief.
- It is this understanding of witness that all Christians are called to provide.
- We are called to witness to our beliefs in the way that we live our lives, engage with others & hold to certain truths.
- Of course, there are some Christians who believe that their witness needs to be more obvious & more clearly stated.

- They feel that providing witness, or testimony, to their faith through spoken proclamation has a greater potential to change lives.
- Whether we choose to witness through our words or through our actions it is essential that both words & actions have integrity; that there is no clash between what we proclaim & the way we live.
- Perhaps the greatest misfortune of Christianity is that so many men & women who call themselves Christian; some may even officially represent the Christian churches, yet in whose hearts Jesus is absent.
- The Church urgently needs witnesses to Jesus, believers who are more like him; Christians who, by their way of being & living, make belief in Christ easier.
- I wonder what our response would be if someone asked us the questions: 'Who are you? ... What do you say about yourself?'
- So often our identity is bound up in our occupation, our possessions, our family.
- We are often asked questions such as 'What do you do? Where do you live? What kind of car do you drive? How many children do you have? Some may even ask: how much money do you earn – especially the Taxation Dept.
- We may even have the opportunity to talk about our achievements, but does that really indicate who we are?
- All too often, people's identity is tied up with what they have & what they've achieved, but surely, that all comes from who we are.
- And, of course you could say that what we do & have & achieve, also create who we are, but this is probably a good time to reflect on who we are.
- Perhaps we could focus our response, as John the Baptist did, on our relationship with Jesus.
- What do you say about this part of your life?
- We are challenged to ponder the same questions & to seek answers in the light of our relationship with God – "Who are you? ... What do you say about yourself? Why are you doing in your life what you are doing."
- The same question can be addressed to the Church - "Who are you? ... What do you say about yourself? Why are you doing in your life what you are doing? How do you, Church, witness to the living Christ?"
- Just as John challenged the people in his own time to be changed, transformed, so we are challenged us to be truly, authentically & unmistakably, the sacramental presence & activity of Christ in the world.