

Our Lady of Lourdes Parish
Westville

Advent Programme
2017

Preparing in Joyful Hope



And he will
be called...
Prince of Peace.

Isaiah 9:6

WEEK TWO: PEACE

Sunday 10 December

Scripture *Mark 1: 1 - 8*

Reflection

In the wilderness of this 'festive season' the voice of John the Baptist is heard "Prepare a way for the Lord, make his paths straight." Some will hear his call and respond to it, some will hear and ignore it as an inconvenience and others will not even hear it.

Last Sunday the call of Jesus was to 'Stay Awake' today the Baptist say 'Prepare'. We can't say that nobody told us! Some of us choose to be stubborn, not to listen, to continue to do our 'own thing'. We behave like the people who are warned about their area being flooded but refuse to vacate their homes.

Today we can choose to see these calls to us as a warning or as an invitation. If we are reluctant followers of Jesus then it's a warning and an inconvenience, a bothersome call like an irritating alarm clock in the morning. When we follow Jesus with a joyful heart then these calls are invitations and we are glad to respond, even excited at the prospect of the Lord's coming. We take it to heart, embark on some serious introspection and realise what we need to 'make straight' in our lives so that the way for the Lord is prepared and ready.

As we begin this second week of Advent we need to have a sense of the closeness of the Lord's coming. In the Book of Revelation 3:20 we read "Behold I stand at the door and knock." The Lord comes knocking on the door of our hearts and our lives and our homes. He will not enter but waits for us to open the door to invite him in. Advent is the time to prepare our homes, our hearts, our lives and our world so that the Lord may enter and find a joyful welcome.

Practical Suggestion

What do you need to do to prepare yourself (and your family) for the Saviour's coming? Here are some suggestions: daily prayer, weekday Mass and frequent reception of the Eucharist, a good examination of conscience and confession, the attitudes of compassion, kindness, gentleness, patience, humility, tolerance and forgiveness.

Prayer

Come Lord Jesus, come into my heart, come into my life, come and be born again within me. Amen. Come Lord Jesus!

Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory be ...



Monday 11 December

Scripture *Isaiah 35: 1 – 10* *Luke 5: 17-26*

Reflection

Today's scripture from Isaiah reminds us that this world of ours and often our own lives, can be like a barren deserts. God, however, is always there to change this barrenness into a beautiful garden. He plants fresh flowers and waters them with his love. If, for some reason, the watering should stop it won't be long before the garden is barren again. Why would God stop watering a garden of his own creation. The answer is that God would never desert his gardens. It is we who are destroying this garden which is our life; and we do it with our sinfulness.

Could we even consider that God could turn his back on one of his "gardens" of which we are and integral part?

The world and all of us who populate it, are a part of God's garden, his creation. If we turn against God by following a sinful life, then we become weeds that choke up and destroy the garden of life.

Is this not exactly what is happening in the world today? People choose to ignore God to whom we owe so much. What's new? We read in the Gospel, how a group of men arrived at the place where Jesus was teaching and because of the crowd, they found it impossible to get a paralysed man to him for healing. Did they panic? No they resorted to 'plan B'. They climbed onto the roof and let the paraplegic down in front of Jesus. Nothing was going to stop them getting their friend to Jesus. The scribes and Pharisees who were present could not see the good in what Jesus said next. He said to the paraplegic, "Your sins are forgiven." They regarded this as blasphemy! Did they not have any compassion for the paralytic? Their hearts were so hardened by their self-righteousness and their own sense of holiness, that they could not recognise the presence God in Jesus. They could not distinguish the flowers from the weeds. Even after Jesus said to the paraplegic, "get up and walk" and he did, these scribes and Pharisees failed to acknowledge that Jesus had the authority to speak in the name and person of God.

In our time far too many people neglect to acknowledge the effective presence of God in the lives of all of us human beings. Many consider that they are doing just fine on their own and it is more comfortable to live without having to answer to God. What could God possibly do to improve what they already have?

Advent is a time to examine our own feelings, to ensure that we are giving credit where credit is due and acknowledging, that everything we have comes from God who provides for all of us his children. He is sending his Son Jesus to strengthen and encourage us to grow, blossom and flourish.

Practical Suggestion

A good examination of conscience is a very useful reality check. This examination needs to be honest, looking carefully at the way we are living and what effect we are having on others. We need to know that we are not like the Pharisees; blind to our own faults and failings. The Advent Examination of Conscience in preparation for the Penitential Service and Christmas Confession is a useful too.

Prayer

Lord God, I look at the world and see how we neglect to acknowledge the many things you do for us. I ask for your forgiveness for the many times when I have been a part of this behaviour. Thank you for the many gifts you have given me. May I never be a party to the destruction of the environment and may I do for others what I would like them to do for me. Amen. Come Lord Jesus!

Tuesday 12 December

Scripture: *Matthew 18:12-14*

“... if he finds it, it will give him more joy than do the ninety – nine that did not stray at all”

Reflection

“Ah – Advent! That time of the year is here again (actually, we are in the second week already). Advent and Christmas is a wonderful time of the year: decorations up all over the show; Santa Claus with his reindeer, trees adorned with tinsel and lights, – people are happy everywhere! It is (for most) a joyful time. Or is it?

Last Tuesday we reflected on how happy God was with His expected coming into our world. Would He still be happy today knowing that we rejoice, not for the celebration at His birth but in all the festive shopping, eating and drinking? Many have forgotten the real meaning of this time. Sadly Advent has little or no meaning for most people!

In today’s Gospel we read of God’s joy when finding one, yes, just one of His lost sheep. So great is his joy and he leaves the ninety-nine to go out and find what was so important to Him - one lost soul who had strayed away from His flock.

God never wants even one of His little ones to be lost but this happens. Even in all the sadness, recovery is always possible because, with God, everything is possible!

God does not and will not give up on us – no matter how often we may stray. Our God is patient. He goes out on search of the stray – we he wants us to do during this sacred time. It is our opportunity to reach out with the love, care and mercy of God to those whom have strayed from their faith and may just be waiting for an invitation to Come Home to their Father’s House. We Prepare in Joyful Hope by inviting others and welcoming back those who respond and return.

Practical suggestion

Invite someone who has lapsed from the practise of their faith to join you at Mass on Sunday (Gaudete Sunday) and/or to attend the Penitential Service with you and/or to attend Christmas Mass.

Prayer

Lord Jesus give me the strength to stay close to you as I Prepare in Joyful Hope for your coming. May I never stray from the path you have to show us which leads to Eternal Life. Amen. Come Lord Jesus!

Wednesday 13 December

Scripture: *Isaiah 40: 25 - 31*

“Those who hope in the Lord renew their strength.”

Reflection

As followers of Jesus, we are called to imitate Him. In the gospel of Mark (10:45) Jesus reminds us that He came to serve and we in turn are called to serve one another.

When we are able to serve others, we usually experience a tremendous sense of satisfaction. Being of service to others however, can be draining both physically and emotionally.

It's been a challenging week and a tired grandmother is looking forward to relaxing and catching up with the TV Series she missed during the week. She's babysitting her two energetic grandchildren who are charging around the house and terrorising the poor cat. “Lord give me strength. Doris mt sister is coming for tea. I know she is lonely and looks forward to our company but the afternoon will be spent listening to the same story at least twenty times over. Lord give me strength. The grumpy next door neighbour's annual check-up at hospital is scheduled for this week. That entails spending a good few hours sitting around waiting when I have so many other things I need to do. It also means having to listen to him moaning and groaning about absolutely everything. Lord give me strength.”

We are given a variety of opportunities every day to be of service to those whom we encounter, but sometimes we are just so tired and there doesn't seem to be enough hours in the day to fit in everything we need to do for ourselves while also being able to make time to be of service to others.

Isaiah reassures us that if we place our hope in God and ask Him for the help that we need He will be certain to answer our prayers and renew our energy and our strength.

Practical Suggestion

Make a concerted effort this week to serve others by demonstrating true compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, forbearance and forgiveness. (Colossians 3:12-13) Often an act of service can be as simple as giving someone a cheerful smile or acknowledging them with a heartfelt greeting. It's often the small gestures that are the most meaningful.

Prayer

Father, as a disciple of Jesus, I want to serve those around me. Give me the strength to carry out works of service joyfully and the strength to stay the course. Amen. Come Lord Jesus!



Thursday 14 December

Scripture: *Matthew 11:11 - 15*

Reflection

John the Baptist was six months older than Jesus and was His cousin. He was a self-denying man completely dead to the pomp and pleasures of this world and was forecast hundreds of years earlier to be the announcer of the presence of the Messiah on earth. He is the greatest of all prophets and the last Old Testament prophet and is held in high esteem in both the Christian and Islamic faiths.

Our Lord praises him as the greatest man ever to live and then compares him to the saints (those in the kingdom of heaven) and places him below them. This is because the least in heaven knows more, loves more, praises God more and receives more from God than the greatest in this world. John had begun one of the most powerful movements known to man: a movement that created a desire to find out and be part of the Kingdom of God. Multitudes thronged around him, and later around Jesus, to be instructed about the kingdom with their spirits highly animated.

To enter the kingdom requires a zeal and zest that borders on what Jesus calls “violence”- people forcefully wanting to take and possess the kingdom for themselves.

Today with most of us having come into Christianity through birth, and seldom ever having been questioned or challenged by the government about our faith, and with most of us having built routines in our relationship with Jesus, we lack that intense desire that Jesus talks about. We have the tendency to resist the Spirit setting our hearts on fire for the kingdom. We have become complacent and we have been lulled into thinking that a place in the kingdom has become our automatic (if not our divine) right.

In this season of Advent we need to scrape away the oyster covering to our hearts and allow our deeply embedded and deeply buried fervent desire for God to animate us and guide our thoughts and actions.

Practical suggestion

Take one aspect of your faith - from going to Mass - to being able to pray every day. Now remove the take-it-for-granted or entitlement tag and fire your heart with gratitude and a real fervour for your faith.

Prayer

Come Holy Spirit, fill my heart and start the fire of your love in it so that I may be recreated in a better image of God the Father and what it means to be a follower of Jesus. Amen. Come Lord Jesus!

Friday 15 December

Scripture: *Matthew 11:16-19*

They condemned both John the Baptist and Jesus.

Reflection

The mediaeval English Benedictine monk and poet, John Lydgate, wrote:

“You can please *some* of the people *all* of the time,

you can please *all* of the people *some* of the time,
but you *can't* please *all* of the people *all* of the time.”

That was the painful experience of John the Baptist and Jesus. John was a loner, living a very austere life of self-denial in the wilderness, surviving on unappetising desert creatures and water. Jesus was more sociable, enjoying a meal and drink with saints and sinners. Whatever either of them said or did, there were always people who found fault with them.

Most of us can identify with John and Jesus. When we have tried our best to be a good parent, spouse, child, ‘in-law’, employee, parishioner, or priest, almost inevitably there has been someone who has taken a dig at us, criticised us, condemned us, or shown their displeasure or contempt in other ways. It is frustrating, hurtful, distressing, even annoying. It can reach the point when we cannot take any more and we may be provoked into saying or doing something that we regret later.

At such times it is worth remembering that not even the Son of God himself could please all the people all the time, not that he tried to do so. It was never his intention to be well-liked. His mission was not to be popular among the people, but to do the will of the *Father* who sent him. Our concern also should be to please only *God all of the time*.

Practical Suggestion

If someone is making life difficult for you, consider whether there is *any* justification for their attitude. Apologise and change if necessary.

If there is *no* justification for what they are doing or saying, you may ask them, as Jesus did: if I have done anything wrong, please tell me what it is; if not, why you are treating me this way? Bullies and abusers do what we allow them to do. Some ‘change their tune’ when confronted. Stand up to them. Be strong, as Jesus was. Always draw strength from him.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, for some people nothing I do is right or good enough. Help me not to be concerned about what *they* say but rather to be faithful to what *you* want me to do. Amen. Come Lord Jesus!

Saturday 16 December

Scripture: *Sirach 48: 1-4; 9 – 11; Matthew 17: 9 – 13*

“Happy shall they be who shall see you”

Reflection

Have you ever wished that you had been around when “so-and-so” lived – so that you could have been part of the great events that were happening at that time? For example, when Moses parted the waters of the Red Sea for the Israelites, or when Abraham Lincoln abolished slavery, or when Mahatma Ghandi got millions to participate in passive resistance to demand independence from colonialism? Or even better still, when Jesus walked the land of Galilee and Judea, working His miracles, and preaching His message of LOVE?

I know that I have often wished that I could have been there when Jesus was physically present – I would have loved to sit at His feet whenever possible and imbibe, in every way possible, the message He was putting across.

That is, however, a pipe dream! Here we are in a world that is very different, and where most things scream of the absence of God rather than point to His presence.

We also know that even when Jesus *was* physically present, people did not accept Him as the Messiah.

The Jewish people were waiting for the return of Elijah, the great prophet, who was expected to return when the Messiah's arrival was imminent. And, because there was no sign of a prophet called Elijah, they refused to believe that Jesus was the expected one.

Jesus makes it quite clear in Matthew's gospel that Elijah *had come again*, but that he had been abominably treated and not recognised. He was talking of John the Baptist, who had, a short time before, been beheaded by Herod.

Jesus asks us to recognise His presence in every person of the human family, and to spread His message of love, hope and forgiveness to every person. Again, we are failing to recognise Him, least of all in the poor, the outcast, those who are hungry, thirsty, homeless etc. What is our excuse?

Time is short, and we need to witness to the faith we say we have!

Practical Suggestion

Reflect for a short while on what your "following Christ" has cost you. Jesus told us quite clearly that discipleship would cost us. Then, decide how you can give of your time, talents, material possessions, so that "one of the least" can benefit and experience a little of the message of love that Jesus represents.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, give me the courage and strength to be your disciple, and to give without counting the cost. Amen. Come Lord Jesus!

The word "Emmanuel" is written in a highly decorative, black cursive script. The letters are intertwined with elegant flourishes, particularly at the beginning and end of the word.

These Daily Reflections for Advent 2017 were written by Fr. Desmond Nair, Lawrence Surgeson, Deacon Mark Wardell, Veronica Donnelly, George Cominos, Fr. Justin Stirton and Irene Helsdon. Please acknowledge the authors when copying and distributing. We wish you blessed Advent!

Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Church, Westville. Advent 2017