

Our Lady of Lourdes Parish

Westville

Advent Programme

2018

Prepare a way for the Lord

P **Peace**
F **On** 
L **Earth**

WEEK TWO: PEACE

Sunday 9 December

Scripture: *Luke 3: 1-6*

Reflection

Luke names the leaders in Israel because it is evidence that the gospel is rooted in history and the time and place of the events are clearly defined for future generations. Most importantly though, he wants us to look behind the figures to realise that Israel was under Roman occupation, that the political leaders were corrupt and that the religious leaders were spiritually bankrupt. This had fed down to the nation. The Jews were disobeying God. Big trouble ahead!

The Jews had last heard the word of God from the prophet Malachi some four hundred years before and were thus in need to hear from Him again. John, a prophet in the spirit and power of Elijah had spent years in the desert preparing for his mission to call all to repentance: Jews, Romans and Gentiles. He used the third type of Jewish baptism (the Mikveh) to wash ceremoniously people's hearts thus cleansing them in anticipation of the coming of the Messiah.

This repentance would enable them to return to a heartfelt obedience to God's commands. But more importantly for them and us, the fruit of that repentance would evidence itself in good works (read further into the gospel) coming from a peaceful heart at one with God. An immense sense of JOY!

We today are called to turn away from sin, making for Christ's entry into our lives, an easy one just as when kings and emperors of old travelled, people would go ahead and clear road for an easier journey – hence the call to make Jesus' paths straight. We are to change morally from the inside out in order to free ourselves from the slavery of sin, that freedom being possible by Our Lord's ultimate sacrifice.

Practical Suggestion

Listen to the Word of God proclaimed at Mass with gratitude – we sometimes take it for granted and this lessens its impact. Imagine not hearing it! Give some thought to how you are going to prepare a way for the Lord this week. What do you need to unclutter from your life?

Prayer

Father, thank you for the voice of John the Baptist powered by the Holy Spirit – the greatest man ever to have lived according to Jesus your Son. Amen



Monday 10 December

Scripture: *Isaiah 35:1-10. Luke 5: 17-36.*

Reflection

Everyone knows how the climate of this world is divided into four seasons; Spring, Summer, Autumn and Winter and most of us have a preference regarding which months of the year we like the best.

For me, living in South Africa, Spring and the early part of Summer is the most enjoyable time of the year. I prefer this time because the weather has warmed up and all that grows, has started to bloom and the beautiful colours that reveal themselves at this time of the year are out in all their glory.

I also enjoy this time of the year, because I am able to throw open all the doors and windows of the house and let in more fresh air, while at the same time, I am able to enjoy spending time outside, unlike in Autumn and Winter when we have shorter and cooler days that serve to restrict our out of house ventures. Yes Spring and early summer are my choice.

Now, if we stop to think about these earthly seasons, it becomes obvious, that our spiritual life is also divided into seasons, some of which are enjoyable and others that are not.

The big difference between the worldly seasons and the spiritual seasons, is the fact that our spiritual seasons are not confined to any particular month of the year. Spiritual seasons come and go, influenced very often by our relationship with others, or maybe our state of health and with the very worldly things that tend to rule our lives; things that effect our behaviour, things that distract us from our commitment to a spiritual life.

So there will be times when we enjoy practicing our faith, but there will also be times when our faith is out the window and only we know why.

Isaiah warns us to be careful of this when he says in today's reading, "*Strengthen all weary hands, steady all trembling knees and say to all faint hearts, "Courage, do not be afraid."*

Sometimes we feel so despondent about our faith, that we cannot find our way back to a more prayerful and spiritual life style. The psalm at Mass today helps to point us in the right direction when it says, "*Look, our God is coming to save us*", but this will only happen, if we are totally convinced of this fact. Only then will we enjoy the benefits of God's help, the help we need to reviving our failing Spiritual lives.

What we need is a change of heart, and today's Gospel account could help to do just that. We are told of the paralysed man who is presented to Jesus for healing and how his life is changed, but this happens only because of the help of his friends and because of the mercy of Jesus. Perhaps this story will help us to see an answer to our spiritual problems.

In this passage, we learn how a paralysed man had to be carried to Jesus for healing, which meant that he was reliant on others. This highlights our need for both worldly and spiritual assistance; assistance we will get from family and friends plus the assistance from the sacraments plus the support of the Church which Jesus established. If we want to renew our faith, then first let us pray for the courage to put all our hope in God, that through the example of Jesus Christ, and the guidance of His Church, we may be saved. Let us be encouraged by the healing of the paralysed man and the help he received from friends as we pray for peace and reconciliation with God – and with all mankind.

Practical suggestion

The paralytic had to rely on his friends for healing. In the same way we need to learn how to rely on the Church and on one another for our spiritual growth and enrichment. The Alpha Course does this for us. If you have already attended Alpha then volunteer to be a helper at the next Alpha. If you haven't done Alpha, sign up for this opportunity for spiritual renewal.

Prayer.

Lord God you sent your only son to teach us the way to heaven. He has given us the power of the Holy Spirit to help us on this way. In your compassion for us sinners, please hear and answer our plea for peace, a peace which comes from knowing you are waiting for us to join you in paradise, where we will be with you for ever and ever. Amen.

Tuesday 11 December

Scripture: *Isaiah 40: 1 – 11; Matthew 18: 12 – 14*

Reflection

“He is like a shepherd... gathering lambs in his arms, holding them against his breast” This is such a beautiful image – one that fills me with ‘warm, fuzzy feelings’! How about you?

Both Isaiah and Jesus speak today of a God who holds out His arms in welcoming love – holding the recipient ‘against his breast’; rejoicing over the return to the fold of one who was lost.

When one has ‘been lost’ and manages to find a way back, or when one returns home after a long absence, the warmth of the hugs from people who care is tonic for the soul and balm for the spirit.

Jesus painted a picture of a God who goes out of His way to look for the lost; who stands and waits on the road to welcome the returning sinner; who throws

a party to celebrate such events!

This is the God we are preparing to meet. Will we welcome **Him** into our hearts and homes with the same joy? Do we offer such welcome to people in our families and communities who have been absent?

Practical suggestion

Is there someone in your community who has been absent for a long time? Can you show them the welcome you would like to receive? OR Has Jesus been absent from your home for some time? Discuss with family how you can welcome Him back into your home and hearts.

Prayer

Thank You, Lord Jesus, for loving me as You do, and being always ready to welcome me back into the fold. May I extend the same grace to others with Your help. Amen.

Wednesday 12 December

Scripture: Isaiah 40: 25-31

“To whom could you liken me”

Matthew 11: 28-30

“Come to me all you who

labour”

Reflection

When we read further into the passage from Isaiah, the sentence above continues; *“and who would be my equal?”* says the Holy One.”

God cannot be likened, nor can anyone be equal to Him - as we know that *everything* has been created by Him. If we know and understand this fact then we would not only be in awe of Him, but more than anything we will be at PEACE with ourselves and, more importantly, with everyone around us – all those whom we meet! This is what happens when we allow God to be in charge!

In today’s Gospel Jesus exclaims; *“Come to me all you who labour and are overburdened and I will give you rest.”* This can be challenging – that we be asked the question; ‘WHO CAN BE EQUAL TO GOD?’

We turn to Jesus when we are in need of direction in our lives and He tells us all the time that He will heal us, He will guide us, He will save us from our enemies (often created in our own mind) and He will give us PEACE.

When Jesus is born again in our hearts at Christmas, we will come to the realisation that lives in us truly as God-is-with-us!

It is only in Him that we can place our HOPE – for forgiveness, a forgiveness which, in turn, brings PEACE. For Jesus is “gentle” and “humble” and it is in him that we will find rest for our souls.

Practical Suggestion

Be consoled by the presence of Jesus in your life, and give Him thanks for all He does in your life. Ask His forgiveness at all times and add to it by either going to a

private Reconciliation or attending the Penitential Service on Tuesday 18 December. You will enjoy the PEACE that this encounter with Jesus will bring to you.

Prayer

All mighty God, we thank you for the strength that you give to us when we are weary. Help us not forget the many blessings and graces that you shower upon us. May we always be aware of your presence within us and your compassion for us. May we live in your PEACE. Amen

Thursday 13 December

Scripture: *Matthew 11: 11 - 15*

Reflection

In today's reading Jesus is talking to the crowds about John the Baptist who had been arrested and imprisoned by Herod. John had sent his disciples to ask Jesus if He was the long awaited Messiah. John's message had not been a popular one among the Scribes and the Pharisees who had rejected his baptism of repentance. Jesus then tells the crowd that the Kingdom of Heaven has been subjected to violence. People will do the most appalling things to silence any person who dares to speak out against sin and wrong doing.

We see evidence of the persecution of the church in our own time. We hear reports of priests being murdered for their faith. We are confronted with the awful reality of the abuse of innocent people by those shepherds of Jesus' flock who vowed to lead and guide those entrusted into their care, into the Kingdom of Heaven. Truly violence against the Kingdom comes in all shapes and forms.

But we know that evil will never triumph over good because God came to dwell among His people and brought the light of His love into a darkened world. In Isaiah 9:2 we read that *"The people who walk in darkness have seen a great light."* In John's gospel 1:5 we are reminded that *"The light shines in darkness and darkness could not overpower it."*

During this time of preparation to welcome Jesus into our world again at Christmas, we cling to the knowledge that "LOVE became flesh and dwelt among us." Out of God's love for sinful man, He sent His Son who entered into all the darkness of the world as it was then and as it is today, but through it all we know that His light and His love remain constant.

Practical Suggestion

The build up to Christmas is often a stressful time and with the smallest of provocation tempers often flare. Crowds in shopping Malls try our patience and inconsiderate drivers test our tolerance levels to the limit. Make an effort to live those qualities we read about in Colossians 3:12-14. *"As the chosen of God, then, the holy people whom he loves, you are to be clothed in heartfelt compassion, in generosity and humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with one another; forgive*

each other if one of you has a complaint against another. The Lord has forgiven you; now you must do the same. Over all these clothes, put on LOVE, the perfect bond."

Prayer

Father, we look forward with eager expectation to welcome the birth of Jesus in our hearts this Christmas. Fill us with your light and your love so that we in turn can be a source of light and love to all those whom we meet during the coming days. Amen

Friday 14 December

Scripture: *Matthew 11: 16 - 19*

Reflection

What a bunch of moaners, groaners and complainers we are! Does anything ever please us? Are we only ever happy and satisfied when things happen our way, the way we want it?

Even Jesus had to contend with the moaners, groaners and complainers. They were dissatisfied with John the Baptist and are equally dissatisfied with him – despite the many differences between them!

It is often said that it's impossible to please everyone all the time. This is true even in our homes and our parishes where tolerance, love, charity and thoughtfulness should appear in abundance. Sadly this is not the case.

What will it take for us to experience peace and harmony in our homes and our parishes (not to mention our world!)? The Real, Living Presence of Jesus! Yes it sounds very simplistic but it is the simple truth. When we open the door of our heart to Jesus and, unlike the Bethlehem innkeepers, we welcome him sincerely and joyfully, and allow him to be born-again and dwell within us, then it is in the conscious awareness of his presence, every minute of every day, that guides and directs our lives. Only in this way can our attitude, behavior and lifestyle be changed.

Practical Suggestion

"The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us!" Every day the Word is made flesh in the celebration of Holy Mass and the gift of the Eucharist. Go to Mass as often as possible this Advent and open the door of your heart to receive Jesus. Then you will be at peace!

Prayer

Lord Jesus come into my heart, come into my life, come and be born-again in me. Amen.

Saturday 15 December

Scripture: *Ecclesiasticus 48: 1 – 4, 9 - 11 Matthew 17: 10 - 13*

Reflection

It is extremely difficult, nay almost impossible to get in shape spiritually if you are only prepared to work at it for one hour on a Sunday. Elijah, a spiritual giant of a man, was described as being awesome and the performer of wondrous deeds! And then the question is asked, “Whose glory is equal to yours?” The answer today comes in form of a question, who else do you know who was taken up into the heavens? Alright, so let’s accept just how important the man and his words were.

Jesus tells Peter, James and John after the transfiguration where they saw Moses, representing the Law, and Elijah representing the prophetic tradition, about Eijah’s return. Jesus then tells the three that Elijah had already returned but was not recognised nor any attention paid to his message. They realize this refers to John the Baptist.

Elijah and John both foretold the Lord’s coming at very different times and, notwithstanding their clear warnings, they were largely ignored. Both spread the message of reconstructing the life in community, because God is the Father, we are his children, all brothers and sisters equal in his sight. Jesus takes the underlying principle one logical step further and joins together the two great loves: love toward God and love toward neighbour and makes them visible as one in the form of living together.

Are you ready to live together with God and your neighbour? Have you heard the call and what have you done to ready yourself? What if you have missed or not heard the call? It is never too late to prepare yourself for the Lords presence.

Practical Suggestion

Prepare for your Sunday Mass and your encounter with Jesus in the Eucharist. Go through the readings for Mass and spend a few minutes reflecting on them. Go to Mass a few minutes early and spend a little time in prayer and preparation. Remember to wear pink for Gaudete Sunday!

Prayer

Open my ears Lord that I may listen to the call to prepare myself for the Saviour’s coming so that he will find me waiting, worthy and prepared. Amen.

These Daily Reflections for Advent 2018 were written by George Cominos, Lawrence Surgeson, Irene Helsdon, Deacon Mark Wardell, Veronica Donnelly, Fr Desmond Nair, and Tony Clewlow. Please acknowledge the authors when copying and distributing. We wish you blessed Advent!

Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Church, Westville. Advent 2018