

## Homily for the 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Advent

At 6.30am last Tuesday morning a 90 year old woman, Margaret Keenan, was the first in the country, indeed in the world, to receive the newly approved vaccine against Covid-19, good news for her and for all of us in these dark days. Good news is the theme of today's scripture. The messenger in the first reading is sent to "bring good news to the poor, to bind up hearts that are broken, to proclaim liberty to captives, freedom to those in prison, to proclaim a year of favour from the Lord." And, this year of favour involved protecting the environment by letting fields lie fallow, cancelling debt, freeing slaves, redistributing capital so as to share economic power in ways that would avoid a permanent underclass. There is something very contemporary here as we look around our world and see the huge differences between the hospitals in our own country and some of those in Venezuela where during last there was neither electricity nor water; or we think of how much money will be spent on Christmas decorations when so many people in our world do not have sufficient to eat.

Equally contemporary is the importance of bearing witness which is something the gospel of John says about John the Baptist. Four times in as many lines John is called a witness, for what? To speak for the light, whom we know to be Christ, who, in the same gospel will call himself The Light of the World, a light, moreover that darkness cannot overcome, and a light in which we are invited to walk. Notice how John when questioned by the priests and Levites says he is NOT the Christ, Elijah or the prophet, but rather a voice crying in the wilderness making a straight path for the Lord. And the Lord is in their midst, though unknown to them. Isn't this an Advent reflection for all of us as we wait to celebrate the birth of Jesus in just under two weeks time? Is Jesus present in people and places we prefer not to see so that we fail to recognise him, maybe in someone on a ventilator, or in the queue for the food bank, or in those waiting for test results.

If we put Good News and Witness together we might ask ourselves how we bear witness to the Good News today? John was a witness to the light, and so we might ask ourselves, are there some dark areas in our own lives on which we need to work, that refusal to forgive someone, that bit of selfishness, that lack of love. And, do we need together to work against the darkness of inequality, of injustice, of violence, of exploitation in all its many forms. The good news is that we can if we live with integrity, if we refuse to suppress the Holy Spirit's promptings, if we are prepared to listen to the prophets of our own day, whether this is a young person like Greta Thunberg or a seasoned campaigner like David Attenborough, if we hold on to what is good, avoid all forms of evil, if we pray constantly and always be grateful to God and to one another, all of which St Paul mentions in the second reading.

Bearing witness to Good News in these ways will bring us a profound joy which will remain with us long after the Christmas lights and decorations have been put away.

## Bidding Prayers for the Third Sunday of Advent

Celebrant:

Rejoice in the Lord always, again I say rejoice, because the Lord is near. With these words in our minds and hearts we turn to God in prayer.

Reader:

For the Church – that the Church will always encourage people to pray with an open and joyful heart, bringing to mind the good things that God has done for us.

Lord in your mercy

For all those who work to uncover a breach of human rights in so many different parts of the world – that as we celebrated Human Rights Day last Saturday we will all support these brave people with our prayers and our own determination to root out injustice in all its forms .

Lord in your mercy

For all those affected by Dementia and other related memory loss diseases, those who suffer and those who care for them – that all will be supported by the love and concern of family and friends.

Lord in your mercy

For those suffering from the Covid 19 pandemic, especially those who do not have recourse to health services in their own countries – that the richer nations will be generous in providing a vaccine for people especially in the developing world.

Lord in your mercy

For those who have died, all victims of violence, accident, natural disaster and the coronavirus pandemic, and Janet King, Agnes Harland, Veronica Davies, Josef Flashka, Arthur Sanderson, Jeremaih O’Driscoll, Anthony Higgins, Pat Holt, Ann Barley, Lorraine Ackerley, Catherine Mullen, John Carey and Theresa Carey whose anniversaries occur this week – that they and all who have died may rest in peace and rise in glory.

Lord in your mercy

Either aloud or in silence we pray for our own special intentions...pause...then

Lord in your mercy

We ask the prayers of Mary as we say, Hail Mary...

Celebrant:

All loving God help us to prepare a way for your Son, Jesus, by straightening our hearts and purifying our desire. Give us both the humility and determination of John the Baptist in these days of Advent. Through Christ our Lord. Amen