

Homily for the 2nd Sunday of Advent

If I were a betting man I would lay odds that not too many people will be familiar with the prophet Baruch who gave us that wonderful first reading. Let me just repeat the first few words, and make them personal, by Baruch addressing you and me. He says, in my case, “Bernard, take off your dress of sorrow and distress, put on the beauty and glory of God for ever, wrap the cloak of the integrity of God around you.” For a moment let those words sink in. There is so much sorrow and distress in our world at the moment, personal and communal. A new variant of Covid, civil unrest in countries where elections are not free, an increasing number of people cruelly affected by dementia, the list goes on. But the invitation is not to pretend that these aren’t real,

At this time of year many people will be wrapping presents to give to others at Christmas, so every time we wrap a present we might remember that if we wrap ourselves with integrity we will enjoy a sense of wellbeing, of wholeness, of peace, because we will not be living out of a set of imposed rules and regulations, but rather by being honest and true to ourselves. Talking of presents, Fr Luis, emailed to say that some of the villages were reading this Sunday’s scriptures for Advent and, as a result they have committed themselves to expressing their love for others by seeing what people really need, rather than want, and trying to meet their needs, be it shopping, providing food or clothing, gardening or simply visiting someone. This picks up a theme in the 2nd reading in which St Paul says, ‘My prayer is that your love for each other may increase more and more and never stop improving your knowledge or deepening your perception so that you can always recognise what is best.’ There is something poetic about these last few words reminding us that reaching out to others in need is arguably one of the best presents we can give. So, our thanks to you, our friends in Nicaragua, for your example of reaching out, reminding us of the ‘wider we’ from some weeks ago.

Much of this is taken into the Gospel where we meet John the Baptist, a key Advent figure, who, we are told, received the Word of God. And what was that word, ‘to proclaim a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.’ There is so much in this short phrase for us to ponder as we remember that repentance is much more than saying sorry. Repentance involves a willingness to take a deep look into our lives and where necessary to acknowledge our sins and to seek forgiveness. Using the analogies in today’s scripture, straightening the winding ways in our own behaviour, knocking the rough edges which can so easily wind people up the wrong way, filling in the valleys of our own lives when we have been devoid of enthusiasm for God’s ways, laying low the mountains or hills which can be of pride or self importance. To embark on this journey we need help and encouragement, the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Advent calls us to change and St John Henry Newman wrote, ‘To be human is to change. To be perfect is to have changed often.’ May we all experience change for the better this Advent.

Bidding Prayers for the 2nd Sunday of Advent

Celebrant:

John the Baptist prepared a way for the Lord by proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. As his messengers today we bring the needs of the world, the Church and ourselves to God.

Reader:

For the Church – that the Church will help us all to prepare a way for the Lord's return in glory.

Lord in your mercy

For our political and civic leaders – that they will respect and honour all those they have been elected to serve.

Lord in your mercy

For our friends in Nicaragua – that under the guidance of Fr Luis they will continue to encourage us by their example of reaching out to those in need.

Lord in your mercy

For all those suffering in body, mind or spirit – that they will know the presence of the Lord and the love and care of family and friends.

Lord in your mercy

For those who have died, all victims of violence, accident, natural disaster and the Covid-19 pandemic, for Monsignor John Moran a retired priest of the diocese who died on Monday and Michael McKeever, Gerard Bradley, Emily Ash, Christopher Murphy, Fr James Murphy, Paul Bickers, Fr Thomas Wilson, Joseph Davies and James Hyland 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, you sent John the Baptist to prepare the way for your Son. May his testimony, preaching and example continue to draw the world into the peace of your kingdom. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen