

## Homily for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Advent

Today in the world of the Covid-19 pandemic we really need to hear the words of consolation spoken by the prophet Isaiah centuries before the birth of Christ when God's people will also be facing an uncertain future. The promise of a vaccine, the ability to visit people in care homes with due precautions, coming out of lockdown are all good news, but the virus is still with us, even if some, who should know better, refuse to believe this, endangering the lives of others, so we know that we still have a way to go.

Isaiah speaks of preparing a way for the Lord, making a straight highway for our God across the desert. On a highway we can see around us, we get a bigger picture, we see the potential of a world where the fortunes of people can be transformed. Isaiah then speaks of a levelling out of the mountains and a filling in of the valleys and we might think of a more equitable sharing of the world's resources, or a generous response to the desperate needs of those affected by drought or flooding brought about by the climate crisis as the Archbishop of Cape Town calls it, this at a time when the British Government has cut foreign aid.

This passage from Isaiah is used to introduce John the Baptist who appears in the wilderness, 'proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.' John appears in all four gospels, he worked no miracles, held no office and belonged to no religious party. Not for him the synagogue or the Temple, but the wilderness, the place of testing and temptation, as much a sacred place as any church or shrine. His preaching and lifestyle attracted a great many people, some of whom would have been banned from the Temple or synagogue, and he pointed away from himself to one who was more powerful than he, to one who would baptise not just with water but with the Holy Spirit.

We have been baptised with that same Holy Spirit and Advent invites us to reflect on where the Holy Spirit is guiding us as we prepare a way for the Lord, a way where, as today's psalm reminds us, justice and peace will embrace. A justice which will include sufficient food and clean water for all, the end to oppression, freedom for those unjustly imprisoned or locked in the slavery of human trafficking or addiction to drugs which bring riches to those who sell them and misery to those who use them. A peace for all, especially those who face the daily horror of the violence of war either between nations or within nations, or of domestic violence which has become more prevalent during the pandemic. Peace for those who live in fear, for those who are ashamed of something in the past, for those whose lives have been blighted by prejudice or slander.

The gospel tells us that the people responded to the call of repentance by confessing their sins. At the beginning of every Mass and in the celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation we do the same trusting in the healing power of God and the gift of the Holy Spirit who will be with us as we prepare a way for the Lord in our own lives, and by reaching out, in the lives of others this Advent.

## Bidding Prayers for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Advent

Celebrant:

We turn to the Father in prayer confident that he hears the cries of the poor.

Reader:

For the Church and its leaders – that in these dark and difficult times of pandemic they will with John the Baptist prepare a way for the Lord into our world.

Lord in your mercy

For our political leaders – that in these dark and difficult times of economic uncertainty and continued austerity especially for the poorest, they will keep in mind the needs of the most vulnerable.

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 celebrate Human Rights Day next 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 the sick in body, mind and spirit – that they will know the healing touch of the Lord's presence and the comfort of those caring for them.

Lord in your mercy

For those who have died, all victims of violence, accident, natural disaster, and the covid pandemic and for Fr Jack Kennedy a retired priest of the diocese who died recently and Michael McKeever, Gerard Bradley, Emily Ash, Christopher Murphy, Paul Bickers, Fr James Murphy MSC, Fr Thomas Wilson, Joseph Davies, and James Hyland, whose anniversaries occur this week – that they and all the dead will 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 turn to Mary waiting in these advent days for the birth of her son as we say, Hail Mary...

Celebrant:

Father in heaven we have listened to your word, proclaimed our faith and brought our needs before you in prayer. We ask you to hear and grant the prayers we make through Christ our Lord. Amen.