

Homily: Sunday 13th December 2020

3rd Sunday of Advent. Gaudete Sunday

Readings for Year B. 1st: Isaiah 61: 1-2. 10-11; Ps Luke 1 (Magnificat); 2nd: 1 Thess 5:16-24; Gospel: John 1:6-8. 19-28

So the first vaccinations have taken place, which many see and have spoken of as a light at the end of the tunnel. Certainly something we've been waiting for quite some time. It has come at the time of year which is the very darkest, and we often sing 'Longing for light we wait in darkness.'

The gospel we've just heard today almost begins in darkness, until the figure of a man appears, and very important 'a man sent by God.' The figure that St John paints in his gospel of John the Baptist, is different from the other Synoptic writers. There is a serenity about John, no description of wearing camel hair and feeding on locusts and wild honey; no mention of the wilderness: no rantings to repent or angry confrontations with officialdom in Jerusalem.

John here is a figure of peace and humility who is a **witness**, a witness to the light, not the light, just a witness to it, but to a light that darkness has not overcome. The emphasis is on **witness**, a word used four times. **Witness** and **light**, but not the light, a witness to the light.

We must also catch the significance of the thrice repeated answer of John, 'I am not...the Christ, nor Elijah nor the Prophet.'

This is a contrast to the seven great "I am" statements which St John accords to Jesus. John's role is to point away from himself towards the Other; the Light; The Word. John is the voice, Jesus is the Word.

"Take away the word and what is a voice? asks St Augustine, "when it conveys no meaning, it is just an empty sound. A wordless voice strikes the ear, but it does not make the heart grow."

John is the lamp....Jesus is the light. The lamp awaits the light. Like John, we are asked by God not to be anything beyond ourselves.

‘I am not...and need not pretend to be...the Great One stands in our midst, lives in our souls.

Our task is to offer ourselves, like John, to be his witness, his voice his lamp. We are to recognise in faith his presence within us. We can hear the message repeated elsewhere in the readings today.

From Isaiah we catch the opening line; ‘The spirit of the Lord has been given to me.’ That scroll Jesus unrolled and read from in the synagogue at Nazareth. And St Paul in the 2nd reading says, ‘never try to suppress the spirit or treat the gift of God with contempt.’

Pope St John Paul wrote “We need heralds of the Gospel, who are experts in humanity, who know the depths of the human heart, who can share the joys, the hopes, the agonies, the distress of people today, but who are, at the same time, contemplatives who have fallen in love with God.” That is us, our calling as a witness to Christ.

This year’s Covid has provided many opportunities to talk to others about God at work, God with us. God always near.

Are we a voice that prepares the way for Christ in others?

Are we a witness to Christ in our family, our work, our social life?

Are we a witness to Christ in our language, attitude, or prejudices?

Are we ashamed of our Christian identity when challenged?

Are we proud to let it be known that we try to live by gospel values?

Do we have that sense of God which means we can rejoice?

He stands among us...unknown, unless we witness to him.