

Homily (notes) from Canon Philip Dyson
4th December 2022 - 2nd Sunday of Advent

Readings (Year A): 1st: Isaiah 11:1-10. Psalm: 71:1-2,7-8,12-13,17. 2nd: Romans 15:4-9.

Gospel: Matthew 3:1-12. (Christ is the saviour of all men)

I think we would all admit that the whole world seems to be in chaos, in so many different ways.

Whichever nation or people we hear or know of, there is much social unrest: protests, withdrawal of labour, natural disasters, climate change; economic problems; the wars and rumours of war, earthquakes, continuing Covid & other health issues.

Mother earth is suffering both with droughts and famines in some places and epic floods in others. There is also that darkness of confusion and ignorance, of oppression by others and depression suffered by many people.

There are many people who have no hope and ask whether they should keep going on with life. We hear of many young people with various mental health problems.

In Advent we are invited to share in the longings and yearning of people through the ages. It is a very different picture painted for us by Isaiah in our 1st reading than the one I have just painted of our times. Not that Isaiah's times were that different from ours, they weren't. In his early days exile was looming; threats from powerful neighbours. But he gives the vision of a very different time.

A time when a leader would come; an ideal king who would bring a time of peace and hope and justice, and a knowledge of God. Integrity and faithfulness will be among his qualities.

This is what the figure of our gospel reading John the Baptist prepares us for. What he tells everyone is the need for a time of repentance, which always means a change of heart: a sort out your life: a clear up your vision; re-assess the values of your life, and then do something about improving.

Everyone needs that, though very many in a blame culture see others as the problem, not them. Many especially in western and our own society, we gather now have little or no belief in God, and if they do have any the blame falls on God. But the root cause of the trouble is human behaviour.

We have been mismanaging our relationships with one another, but also with creation, with animals, plants, the earth's mineral resources. The dangers humanity faces are mainly the results of human actions.

And God, far from being the problem, is providing the answer by sending his Son. All the gospels begin the story of salvation wrought by Jesus, by recalling the proclamation of the Kingdom by John the Baptist, the last in the long line of prophets who announces the saving act of God in Jesus.

Where there is darkness there is need for light. John speaks of spirit and fire. Fire, that pillar of light that led the people of old by night, through the darkness. Light helps us to see what is already there.

Jesus comes as a light in the darkness: the light of the world. Our 2nd Advent candle we may think of as **light**: the light beginning to shine in the darkness: not forgetting the other candle let last week **hope**.

St Paul picks that up in the 2nd reading. There he speaks of the immense hope that the scriptures bring, for they are centered upon Jesus, who is God's hope in our midst; a light shining in darkness.

Following our 2nd reading Paul concludes with a prayer which includes such wonderful Christian key words, that we can make our own for this week:

“May the God of hope bring you such joy and peace in your faith that the power of the Holy Spirit will remove all bounds to hope.”