

## Homily (notes) from Canon Philip Dyson

### 30th January 2022 - Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Readings (Year C): 1st: Jeremiah 1:4-5. 17-19. Psalm: 70. 2nd: 1 Corinthians 12:31–13:1.

**Gospel:** Luke 4:21-30.

We cannot be unaware of the very tense times we are living through, with so much going on all around the world... Pope Francis, speaking a little while ago said “We have lost our sense of security, we find ourselves increasingly frail and even fearful, caught up in a succession of ‘crises’ in health care, the environment, food supplies, the economy, to say nothing of social and humanitarian and ethical crises, and many protests. All these crises are profoundly interconnected. They also forecast a ‘perfect storm’ that could rupture the bonds holding societies together.”

He then says “every crisis calls for vision. We can confront these crises by retreating into isolationism, protectionism and exploitation. Or we can see in them a real chance for change, a genuine moment of conversion, and not simply in a spiritual sense.”

Throughout human history we can read of similar times.

This week you may have seen the BBC2 programme or heard of the portraits that Prince Charles had commissioned of seven of the survivors of the holocaust, all of them now in their 90’s, and all came through the atrocities and horrors of Auschwitz & Belsen. It was very moving to hear and see them. One man in particular urging us all not to hate. To love, not necessarily to like, but certainly not to hate.

The **Reflect** on our newsletter front cover for Epiphany struck me too. It began:

*‘There has been, in recent years, an alarming increase in nationalist sentiment in many countries. We might reflect on the difference between patriotism and nationalism. **Patriotism** is a justifiable pride in our own people’s history and culture. It emphasises the positive aspects of what our nation is and stands for; it sees how we relate to other national groups in terms of diplomacy, trade, and language and so on. It sees our nation as one among equals. **Nationalism** is a negative emotion: it sees our nation as superior to others consequently, members of other nations are inferior to ourselves and so can be treated as such. Many of the tragedies, international national and personal, at the present time, can be traced back to this attitude.’*

Today’s gospel is the concluding part of the story we had last weekend. Jesus had announced in the synagogue at Nazareth the promised Jubilee, which he calls in the words of Isaiah “the Lord’s year of favour.” His manifesto beginning his work here on earth.

The people listening to him were wildly enthusiastic about the prospect. The words he speaks are pure grace. Suddenly the whole mood changes. By the end of today’s reading they are so set against him, that for the second time in his life, he is in mortal danger (1<sup>st</sup> was from King Herod)

What was it that had happened to make the crowd turn against him so quickly? To understand, put yourself in their shoes. They had been upset because Jesus had been working all kinds of miracles and healings in Capernaum and other places, leaving the sick in his home town of Nazareth in their suffering. Jesus admits this, but he does not apologise. In fact makes it worse by telling them that his work and the Lord’s year of favour will not be restricted to them, but will extend to non-Jews and pagans. He reminds them of two non-Jews blessed by God in the scriptures; Naaman the Syrian, and the widow from Zarephath, a Sidonian town.

The crowd will not accept that they have to share this wonderful prospect with others. They want to keep the best things in life – that is God and God’s favours- within their own closed circle. This same stance lies at the heart of nationalistic and racist attitudes and religious separatism.

Our 1<sup>st</sup> reading, Jeremiah is at the outset of what was to prove a very troubled ministry during which his life would more than once be at risk. Jeremiah, often rejected, he foreshadows Christ who from the outset

met with opposition. Jeremiah was not promised easy success; his work will be to wrestle with unbelief, indifference and false confidence.

The situation was a critical one for the world of that time. Jeremiah was born about 650BC. Assyria, a brutal and fierce power had passed its peak. Marauding bands of Scythians swept down from the north and harassed Palestine. In 612 Assyria collapsed and Babylon (now Iraq) came to power. Called to his ministry in 627BC it was to a troubled situation, in which powerful political forces and tough individuals waged war, Jeremiah was to speak uncomfortable words to the people: as Jesus had to in Nazareth...

Today in our own country, many who teach and speak of our Catholic faith, esp. on Pro-life issues among others, are quashed or silenced.

Rejection is a theme that will recur more and more as we move towards the drama of Holy Week. After the encouragement and hopefulness of Advent and Christmastime, we are now given the first hint that there will be hardship and opposition. This will culminate in the Lamentations of Jeremiah and the Reproaches of the Christ-Prophet on Good Friday. But for now it is just an initial reminder. What are we being told? That within ourselves, within our “home town”, we are capable of rejecting the Word of God; likewise, with ourselves, within our “home town”, we ourselves may suffer hostility and rejection on account of The Word.

But fear not for I am with you to deliver you: the Lord speaks.

Canon Philip Dyson

LISTEN to Gospel and longer homily recording at Sunday 11am Mass via our homilies page

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