

Homily (notes) from Canon Philip Dyson
10th December 2023 - 2nd Sunday of Advent

Readings (Year B): 1st: Isaiah 40:1-5,9-11. 2nd: 2 Peter 3:8-14. **Gospel:** Mark 1:1-8.

In this technological age, we are often speaking to electronic answering systems. Having dialled the number we want, we are then invited to make choices according to our needs, then of course being put in a queue. If we have to wait too long many of us will give up on the call, frustrated that we cannot speak to a person.

Advent is a time of waiting & the voice of God trying to connect with us.

In the first reading God is urging Isaiah to console, to comfort the people and speak to their hearts so that they may know the presence of God with them.

Generation after generation, God is moved to restore liberty to his people after they have got themselves into miserable situations.

It is far worse than just a miserable situation that confronts us and the whole world this Advent.

I did speak on Remembrance Sunday about Christmas celebrations in Bethlehem being cancelled, and not only in Bethlehem, but some other surrounding countries. **Masses will continue, with the focus on praying for peace.** The situation as we see and hear goes from bad to worse.

I go back to some words from ‘**Not in God’s name: Confronting religious violence**’ ‘by the late Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks. ‘Despite predictions of continuing secularisation, the 21st century has witnessed a surge of religious extremism and violence in the name of God. This book is a rebuke to all those who kill in the name of the God of life, wage war in the name of the God of peace, hate in the name of the God of love, and practise cruelty in the name of the God of compassion.’

Blaise Pascal: French theologian and mathematician, who lived through the 30 Years War, in the 17th Century, which were religious and political wars between Catholic and Protestant in European Continental states and powers: *men never do evil so completely and cheerfully as when they do it from religious conviction.*

Our Psalm today, Psalm 84(85): 9-14 is the 2nd half of the Psalm and is very dear to Christian tradition.

Pope St John Paul II commenting on this psalm says: “It describes a new world in which God’s love and his faithfulness embrace each other as if they were persons. Similarly, justice and peace meet and kiss each other. Truth sprouts up as if in a new springtime and justice, which for Scripture also means salvation and holiness, appears from heaven to begin its journey in the midst of humanity. All the virtues, at first expelled from the earth by sin, now re-enter history and meet, drawing a map of world peace. Mercy, truth, justice, peace become the four cardinal points of this geography of the spirit.”

St Irenaeus of Lyons in the 2nd century saw these words as a proclamation of Christ, who’s coming is the source of mercy, the springing up of truth, the flowering of justice, the spender of peace.

This is why this Psalm, especially these verses today are re-read by the Christian tradition in terms of Christmas.

St Augustine uses it in one of his homilies for Christmas, which is set in the Office of Readings for 24th December.

Isaiah in the Advent Prose, Rorate Coeli, in the *Douai translation* has “Drop down dew, ye heavens, from above; and let the clouds rain the just. Let the earth be opened and bud forth a Saviour and let justice spring up together.” (Is: 45:8)

Commenting on that, one says “here we have a magnificent expression of the work of God, the Saviour. Justice is total uprightness.

We might express it: a life according to truth and love.

Justice must come from God, indeed it does in the person of Jesus Christ, *the Just one*, who will blossom from the earth, born of a virgin mother.

The Church’s Advent/Christmas liturgies make use both of the psalm and Rorate Coeli.

Very sadly indeed it is bombs raining down in Gaza and elsewhere as well.

Advent - a time of hope and expectation. God’s saving deeds in the past have led us to expect great things from him but the coming of Jesus exceeds all human expectations; in him we have seen ***God’s glory; in him God’s mercy and faithfulness are united, in him justice and peace are made possible.*** God’s saving goodness has stooped down from heaven and our earth produced its perfect fruit:

Jesus, the Saviour who brings peace to people of good will, to all who turn to him in their hearts. Jesus is the Good News Mark lays before us in this year of Mark.

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