

## Homily (notes) from Canon Philip Dyson

12th November 2023 - **32nd Sunday in Ordinary Time & Remembrance. Sunday**

Readings (Year A): 1st: Wisdom 6:12-16. 2nd: 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18. **Gospel:** Matthew 25:1-13.

In a few weeks we shall all be heart and mind in Bethlehem. Normally every day is Christmas in Bethlehem. Jordan has cancelled all Christmas celebrations, except for Masses, in solidarity with Palestinian Christians. The Holy Land is in absolute turmoil.

Last week a Catholic Palestinian Christian born, bred and still living in Bethlehem has described how war, disease and economic crisis are hitting the faithful in the place where Christ was born.

Speaking to Aid- to- the- Church- in- Need, Rony Tabash, a member of a Catholic family that has lived in Bethlehem for generations explained how the current conflict is directly impacting the Christian community in the West Bank, obviously not even to mention Gaza.

All of us who have been to the Holy Land with Della know Rony. Rony's family shop sells religious items in Manger Square. A shop full of holy things esp. rosaries and cribs; A.C.N. use many things from Rony's shop for their catalogue. His mother, Allet was a brilliant help to Christine on our first pilgrimage when she fell and had to go to hospital in Bethlehem.

Rony says he had hoped to finally pay off his debts and recover economically after over 2 years of no pilgrims during the Covid pandemic. Israel only opened its borders fully later in 2022. Now Rony finds himself confronting a bleak reality.

The absence of pilgrims has left the local economy in ruins, affecting all sectors that rely on religious tourism, from hotels and restaurants to olive-wood craftsmen and souvenir sellers and many more. He stresses the importance of pilgrims to the Christian community in Bethlehem and adds that lack of visitors has left many families jobless and hopeless. He said "there are no pilgrims -everything is empty, there is no one, and they say it will last at least until Easter.

He also expressed concern for the safety of his family and other citizens of Bethlehem. 'These days, there are bombers in the sky over Bethlehem- children are scared, my kids don't want to be separated from our side.'

Rony also highlighted the additional difficulties experienced by those who "due to Covid and the absence of pilgrims during that long time, sought work in Jerusalem. Now the check points are closed, and entry permits for Palestinians have been blocked.

A few who have dual nationality are leaving because they have lost hope. He said 'A friend of mine who had a small bus company is leaving the Holy Land this weekend.' The coach, driver and guide last year were from Bethlehem. 'I keep opening my shop every day. People ask me why I'm going; I'm the only one opening. The only thing that sustains me is faith, without faith I couldn't continue, not even for a minute. We've lost hope, all that is left is faith.'

Rony stressed that his family planned to stay in Bethlehem. "I can't leave this -I can't leave my parents. Our family has owned this shop since 1927. My father says: 'have faith Bethlehem is a sacred place, it won't be touched.' 'Yes, I will stay because it is a sacred place, we're living where Jesus was born; we can't leave.' 'As a Palestinian Christian my mission is to be here, even though every day new challenges come. The war has to end. We want peace.'

Rony makes an appeal knowing pilgrims can't travel physically there, urging us to be present in other ways: 'come with your prayers, come with actions asking for peace.'

'Come with your support for Christian families of the Holy Land.'

When the Council Fathers of Vatican II were meeting in the 1960's which in the early 60's we knew as 'the cold war' with Russia and Cuba and the great nuclear threat, & following Pope St John XXIII's encyclical **Pacem et Terris**: *peace on earth*: their last document was '**Gaudium et Spes**': '*The joy and hope, the grief and anguish of our time*' they wrote,

'Peace is not merely the absence of war. Instead, it is rightly and properly called 'the effect of justice.' Peace is the fruit of the harmony built into human society by its divine founder and is brought about by people as they strive to attain an even more perfect justice.

Peace is not something that can ever be attained once and for all, but something that must constantly be built up.

Peace-making efforts will be fruitless as long as hostility, contempt, and distrust as well as racial hatred and uncompromising ideologies continue to divide humanity and put them in opposing camps. Wars thrive on injustice and the quest for power.

**Pray earnestly for justice so as to bring peace.**

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