

REDEEM

Daily Advent & Christmas Reflections 2014



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1 December 2014

Monday of the first week of Advent

“Sir, I am not worthy to have you under my roof.”

(Matthew 8:6)

One of the tasks which I enjoy in my ministry is visiting parishioners who are confined to their homes. When I get a call to visit a sick parishioner it is not unusual that the sick person would apologise that their house was not in a fit state to receive a priest. The house might be a simple dwelling, or it might be untidy, or even in a state of disrepair. Whenever I hear this in a greeting, my response simply is, “I may be the one who is not worthy!”

When Jesus said to the centurion that he would come to his home to cure his paralysed servant, the centurion replied, “Sir, I am not worthy to have you under my roof.”

We pray this same prayer at every Mass when the priest elevates the Host before the distribution of Holy Communion. The prayer is a reminder that none of us is worthy to be in the Lord’s presence. Yet, our baptism means that that is where we are called to be, no matter how unworthy.

However, I am not only called to be in the Lord’s presence, I am also called to be in the presence of my brothers and sisters, especially the needy. In true humility I acknowledge my own unworthiness before them and pray that my response is to be the other-Christ.

Loving God, grant me the humility to know that I am not worthy to be in your presence, but that is where You want me to be. Amen.

Dean Ron Peters Adm

*Today’s Readings: Isaiah 2:1-5; Psalm 121:1-2. 4-5. 6-9;
Matthew 8:5-11*

11 December 2014

Thursday of the second week of Advent

**“A greater than John the Baptist has never been seen.”
(Matthew 11:11)**

A sound system can make the softest voice louder than the loudest voice in the world. And a car can make the slowest person in the world faster than the fastest runner. Likewise, belonging to the Kingdom of God can make the least person in the world greater than John the Baptist (*Those facts courtesy of Fr Mark Link SJ*). But membership demands responsibilities. In these days of Advent we recall the first coming of Jesus, and how he established that Kingdom. Now we are reminded that he left us an unfinished work. He now wants us to be his presence in our world. This will always be a daunting prospect. It's hard to see ourselves as good as Jesus. Someone wrote a lovely little verse relating to the Ascension:

You called us, Lord, you must recall.

We never said we had it all.

So long Jesus.

Here come the amateurs.

Amateurs have won the Australian Open Golf Championship. As long as we are willing and good-hearted followers of Jesus, we can do much of what John the Baptist did – prepare the way of the Lord for many who don't know that way, or have wandered from that path of life. We could do worse than recall the words of Abraham Lincoln:

***After I die, I want it said of me, that I plucked a weed
and planted a flower wherever I thought a flower would
grow.***

Fr Bede North Adm MSC

Today's Readings: Isaiah 41:13-20; Psalm: 144:1, 9-13;

Matthew 11:11-15

16 December 2014

Tuesday of the third week of Advent

“The humble shall hear and be glad.” (Psalm 33:2)

After the challenge in the Gospel yesterday about the authority of Jesus, today he tells a parable to the religious leaders. Two sons are asked to go and work in their father’s vineyard – one says, “yes” and doesn’t go; one says, “no” and ends up going. The parable emphasises that doing is more important than mere words.

On a deeper level the religious leaders imagined that they were doing the will of God yet they refused to believe in both John the Baptist and now in Jesus. But those who seemed to be a long way from God because they were regarded as deeply sinful and as violators of the law – they responded to the call of John to repentance.

The challenge for us is starkly obvious – it is not enough to spend time praying in church unless we also spend even more time doing and loving outside of it. Most of our churches will be jam-packed next Wednesday night with lots of people that we haven’t seen since last Christmas. We can choose to either be critical and judgemental about their appearance – or welcome them as the ones who at least on Christmas Eve say yes and do what the Father asks. We have said yes to God by being part of the Church – let us say yes again by actively welcoming and encouraging others to join us in the field hospital for the humble and sick.

***Lord, help us to be humble and to do your will today.
Amen.***

Fr Richard Healey

Today’s Readings: Zephaniah 3:1-2, 9-13; Psalm 33:2-3, 6-7, 16, 18-19, 23; Matthew 21:28-32

23 December 2014

Tuesday of the fourth week of Advent

“The Lord you are seeking will suddenly enter his Temple.” (Malachi 3:1)

The prophet Malachi, like all those who had gone before him, is assuring the people that the Messiah will come. This message offers a word of comfort and encouragement, but also a word of warning – the Messiah’s coming is not to be taken lightly. We too know in faith that Christ comes to us daily in the ordinariness of our lives. The question for us is – Do we recognise Jesus when he comes to us? Elizabeth and Zachariah recognised God’s visitation to them in the birth of their son, John. Zachariah’s tongue was untied in praise as he obediently named the child for God’s calling.

Most of us have heard the story of the *Cobbler’s Dream*, in which Jesus promises Martin he will pass by his shop next day (Christmas Eve) and , if invited, will come in. The cobbler waits for him in vain, while helping many poor and needy people throughout the day. Only when he complains to Jesus at day’s end that he did not come, does Jesus explain that he came in the person of each poor and needy person Martin had helped that day. A simple Christmas story, yet its challenge is relevant to our pre-Christmas readings. Will I recognise Jesus in the people he sends my way today or will my Christmas be simply a remembering the event 2,000 years ago when a child lay in a manger in Bethlehem? Do I respond like Elizabeth and Zachariah in faithful, responsive action to pave the way for Christ’s comings?

Jesus, help me recognise your presence in every person I meet today. Amen.

Sr Sue Barker SGS

Today’s Readings: Malachi 3:1-4, 23-24; Psalm 24:4-5, 8-9, 10, 14; Luke 1:57-66

CHRISTMAS



Artwork Spotlight

"The Nativity"

Master of the Annunciation

"The Nativity", by Master of the Annunciation, 14th Century, fresco, Italy; Veneto; Verona; San Fermo church; Basilica Inferiore. All. Fragmentary state of preservation the Virgin Mary Madonna holding the Child / Infant Jesus / Christ Child / Baby Jesus / Child Jesus in her harms angel. Photo: akg-images / Mondadori Portfolio / Paolo Manusardi

Another fresco (ie, painted on fresh wall plaster) – this one painted by an artist called the Master of the Annunciation in the fourteenth century. It rests in the Basilica Inferiore of San Fermo in Verona. Sadly, as can be seen, only fragments of the fresco still remain.

The fresco seems to be in the style of an icon – the artist is trying to capture certain truths. Notice the eye contact of mother and child. Both are contemplating each other. God wishes to come so close to us. We are represented by Our Lady, and Jesus is pressing his cheek as close as He can.

The child is tightly wrapped in swaddling clothes, a reminder of the shroud clothes he will wear in his tomb. This Child has come to die. For the Church, Christmas is no Feast of sentimentality. Another reminder of impending death is the manger from which the ox and ass are feeding – it is a miniature tomb, the usual representation in Orthodox Art.

It is only St Luke who tells us of the manger (or feeding trough), a hint that the child will feed us with himself. The place of the manger is Bethlehem – in Hebrew, *the house of bread*.

Fr Graham Schmitzer PP

25 December 2014

The Nativity of the Lord

“He was in the world that had its being through him, and the world did not know him.” (John 1:10)

We Christians make the claim that the Divine Son, through whom the world had its being, once became a defenceless baby. For many, this is absurd – a reason that they cannot accept Christianity. But why?

No one can doubt that God could do this if he chose. The deeper question is – why would God choose to do this? Why would the transcendent God choose to take on himself the weaknesses and limitations of our humanity? Why would God, enjoying the eternal perfection of heaven, choose to enter into a suffering and sinful world like ours?

If we find this hard to believe, it is only because we cannot grasp the infinite depth of God’s compassion for us. The essential meaning of *compassion* is to *suffer with* those who suffer. And if God could become one of us, but chose not to – choosing instead to remain distant from our suffering and sinfulness – then could we still speak of a God of infinite compassion?

And so Christmas is a day of joy, but also of consolation for all who are in any kind of sorrow. Indeed, as Pope Francis writes, “I realise of course that joy is not expressed the same way at all times in life, especially at moments of great difficulty. Joy adapts and changes, but it always endures, even as a flicker of light born of our personal certainty that, when everything is said and done, we are infinitely loved.” (*The Joy of the Gospel*, 6)

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At times we can feel that God is on *our side* when things are going well, but that when things go wrong, God must be distant from us. He is not! In Jesus, God has chosen to enter into a suffering world; and in his ministry, Jesus chose to draw near to those who were suffering – the poor, the sick, the lonely, the grieving, the sinner – all who thought God was distant from them – to assure them of God’s loving presence with them too.

And yet we are told that many did not accept Jesus; and many still do not accept him today. Why not? Perhaps because to accept him means to accept a challenge – to go and do likewise. In a world that encourages us to put ourselves first, the call to empty ourselves for others – to even be willing to share in the sufferings of others – goes against the grain. But in the words of Pope Francis, “God asks everything of us, yet at the same time he offers everything to us.” (*The Joy of the Gospel*, 12)

Indeed, in Jesus, God offers us nothing less than his very self! Let us once again joyfully receive this gift that surpasses anything the human mind could have ever imagined! And let us strive to offer more of ourselves to others, and so to grow, day-by-day, into the likeness of Jesus who lives within us – for, “to all who did accept him, he gave power to become children of God”.

Father, through your Son Jesus, help me to know the joy of your love in my life, and to bring your joy to others. Amen.

Fr Duane Fernandez

Day Readings: Isaiah 52:7-10; Psalm 97:1-6; Hebrews 1:1-6; John 1:1-18; John 1:1-5. 9-14

29 December 2014

Fifth Day in the Octave of Christmas

“And a sword will pierce your own soul too – so that the secret thoughts of many may be laid bare.”

(Luke 2:35)

Are these not gripping words? Who of us has not known what it is to have a sword pierce our soul? How many of us have spent sleepless nights over one issue or another? How many of us have been on the end of a *war zone* of words that have left us almost paralysed? How many of us have known a loss so deep we think we will never live again?

The worst swords are the ones we never ask for, the ones that just come. As you read this no doubt your mind has wandered back to the last time a sword pierced your own soul. Awful wasn't it? It can be the case that in such an event, truth gets faced either about us or someone else and secret thoughts are laid bare. Once that happens, you and I can begin to sort our way through whatever the issue is and find some resolution.

Here is Mary simply being told that, unasked for, she too would know a sword that would pierce her soul. She doesn't argue or try to avoid it – I suspect she only hugged Jesus closer to herself. Remember next time a sword comes your way, there is someone who takes a personal interest in it. She was told about that secret thought a long time ago and has been waiting for you. A prayer to say over and over again when then sword afflicts you:

Mary companion and mother of my afflicted heart, hold my hand and bring me your son. Amen.

Sr Hilda Scott OSB

Today's Readings: 1 John 2:3-11; Psalm 95:1-3, 5-6;
Luke 2:22-35