



Preparing for the Mass of Sunday 8th December 2013 - The Second Sunday of Advent

1 Relax & Remember

Set aside 10 -15 minutes and create a suitable environment by removing any distractions. Make sure that you are comfortable. Perhaps light a candle. Make the sign of the cross † and remain still for a minute of settling silence. **Call to mind the love that God has for you. Remember that through this scripture our Lord is truly present.** Then read the Gospel, preferably aloud and slowly, and pay attention to any words that stand out. If any do, meditate on them for a few minutes and be invited into a dialogue with God.



2 Read

The Gospel for Sunday 8th December 2013 - John the Baptist's Call to Repentance (Matthew 3:1-12)

In due course John the Baptist appeared; he preached in the wilderness of Judaea and this was his message: 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is close at hand.' This was the man the prophet Isaiah spoke of when he said: "A voice cries in the wilderness: prepare a way for the Lord, make his paths straight." This man John wore a garment made of camel-hair with a leather belt round his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. Then Jerusalem and all Judaea and the whole Jordan district made their way to him, and as they were baptised by him in the river Jordan they confessed their sins. But when he saw a number of Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism he said to them, 'Brood of vipers, who warned you to fly from the retribution that is coming? But if you are repentant, produce the appropriate fruit, and do not presume to tell yourselves, "We have Abraham for our father," because, I tell you, God can raise children for Abraham from these stones. Even now the axe is laid to the roots of the trees, so that any tree which fails to produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown on the fire. I baptise you in water for repentance, but the one who follows me is more powerful than I am, and I am not fit to carry his sandals; he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing-fan is in his hand; he will clear his threshing-floor and gather his wheat into the barn; but the chaff he will burn in a fire that will never go out.'



3 Reflect

After spending a few minutes considering this Gospel, continue by reading Fr Henry Wansbrough's reflection.

'Repentance' seems an unattractive word. It conjures up images of morose brooding over past sins and failures, a negative idea. This is not what John the Baptist proclaimed. His message was wholly positive. In Hebrew and Greek the concept of 'repentance' is about a change of behaviour, a change of direction. John is calling on his listeners to change their ways, to change their scale of values, their whole direction of life. To reinforce his message he wears the clothes worn by Elijah, the prophet whom Jewish tradition taught was to return to announce the final coming of the Lord. John proclaims his message in the desert, that apocalyptic landscape of the arid and bare Jordan Valley, below sea-level, where merchants would be crossing the Jordan on the road to the East. So John makes a deliberate claim to be this final prophet and to be preparing a way for the Lord. We see Jesus as the Messiah, the loving Saviour, but John was not at this point proclaiming this Jesus. He was proclaiming the threatening and imminent arrival of the sovereignty of God, when rotten trees would be cut down and evil swept away to be burnt in unquenchable fire. If we are to be open to the arrival of the Kingship of God, we may need to look to our own scale of values.

Is my scale of values compatible with those of the Kingship of God? How far do they coincide?

Dom Henry Wansbrough OSB

4 Respond & Request

Now slowly and prayerfully read the Gospel once again but this time in silence. Consider how this Gospel could apply to your life in general. Then thank God for any insight you may have received. Conclude by asking God to bless you with one of the following spiritual gifts to help you act on any resolution you have made: love, understanding, wisdom, faithfulness, peace, self control, patience, or joy. Please remember to pray for the Church and particularly our school families. **Then conclude by requesting the prayers of Our Lady & St Joseph.**



WEDNESDAY WORD PLUS †

Fr Henry's reflections on the first and second readings of Sunday 8th December 2013



First Reading: *A Shoot from the Stock of Jesse*

Isaiah 11:1-10

A shoot springs from the stock of Jesse, a scion thrusts from his roots: on him the spirit of the Lord rests, a spirit of wisdom and insight, a spirit of counsel and power, a spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord. The fear of the Lord is his breath. He does not judge by appearances, he gives no verdict on hearsay, but judges the wretched with integrity, and with equity gives a verdict for the poor of the land. His word is a rod that strikes the ruthless; his sentences bring death to the wicked. Integrity is the loincloth round his waist, faithfulness the belt about his hips. The wolf lives with the lamb, the panther lies down with the kid, calf and lion cub feed together with a little boy to lead them. The cow and the bear make friends, their young lie down together. The lion eats straw like the ox. The infant plays over the cobra's hole; into the viper's lair the young child puts his hand. They do no hurt, no harm, on all my holy mountain, for the country is filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters swell the sea. That day, the root of Jesse shall stand as a signal to the peoples. It will be sought out by the nations and its home will be glorious.

From this reading the seven gifts of the Spirit are, rather artificially, derived. Seven is the perfect number, so this prophetic text intends to signify that the promised ruler will have all possible gifts of what we more generally call wisdom and understanding. He will be a ruler before whom one can stand in the secure knowledge that his judgment will be deeply fair and satisfying. The 'fear of the Lord' ensures that the ruler will govern in accordance with the divinely-ordered bases of creation. Just such a Ruler is the one we are waiting for at Christmas. It was surely these qualities which made Jesus such an attractive and charismatic figure, so that he could, as a wholly unknown stranger, pass those fishermen, and they would drop everything and respond to his call, 'Follow me'. Confrontation with his person was shock enough and inspiring enough to cure sickness. His simple word gave assurance of forgiveness of sin. His command reduced the elements of nature to serenity. In the second half of the reading we see the consequences of this rule: a return to the peace of the Garden of Eden. No more hostility, no more jealousy. Nature, even human nature, will not be red in tooth and claw.

What qualities do you find attractive in Jesus?

Second Reading: *The Generosity of Christ*

Romans 15:4-9

Everything that was written long ago in the scriptures was meant to teach us something about hope from the examples scripture gives of how people who did not give up were helped by God. And may he who helps us when we refuse to give up, help you all to be tolerant with each other, following the example of Christ Jesus, so that united in mind and voice you may give glory to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. It can only be to God's glory, then, for you to treat each other in the same friendly way as Christ treated you. The reason Christ became the servant of circumcised Jews was not only so that God could faithfully carry out the promises made to the patriarchs, it was also to get the pagans to give glory to God for his mercy, as scripture says in one place: For this I shall praise you among the pagans and sing your name.

“The perfect generosity of Jesus Christ must be the model for our own generosity.”

Paul is here summing up his message to the Romans, a fragmented community of several house-churches, some drawn from the Jewish community, some from the gentiles. He has described and analysed Christ's work of salvation, the generosity of Christ in giving himself up for us, to win us back to the Father. Then he calls upon his hearers to imitate Christ's generosity. He speaks first to the Christians sprung, like himself, from Judaism, reminding them of the promises of scripture (the heritage of Judaism) which were to inspire them with hope, for God's promises are never-failing and sure. Then he reminds them with a string of quotations (only the first of which is given at the end of today's reading) that God's promises were intended for the gentiles too, so that they too should praise God's name. Why are we given this reading in Advent? Because the perfect generosity of Jesus Christ in taking on this work of our salvation must be the model for our own generosity, both to those who are our natural friends and to those who are not, and because it must be the basis of our hope; however neglectful and ungrateful we are, Christ's work for us cannot have been in vain.

In what way can I be more generous to prepare for Christmas, especially to those who are not my natural friends?

The Wednesday Word: *Connecting Home, School & Parish through the Word of God*
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