



Preparing for the Mass of Sunday 15th December 2013 - The Third 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

Taken from the Gospel for Sunday 15th December 2013 - Miracles of the Messiah (Matthew 11:2-11)

John in his prison had heard what Christ was doing and he sent his disciples to ask him, 'Are you the one who is to come, or have we got to wait for someone else?' Jesus answered, 'Go back and tell John what you hear and see; the blind see again, and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised to life and the Good News is proclaimed to the poor; and happy is the man who does not lose faith in me.' As the messengers were leaving, Jesus began to talk to the people about John: 'What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed swaying in the breeze? No? Then what did you go out to see? A man wearing fine clothes? Oh no, those who wear fine clothes are to be found in palaces. Then what did you go out for? To see a prophet? Yes, I tell you, and much more than a prophet: he is the one of whom scripture says: Look, I am going to send my messenger before you; he will prepare your way before you. I tell you solemnly, of all the children born of women, a greater than John the Baptist has never been seen; yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he is.'



3 Reflect

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

*John the Baptist was expecting a Messiah of judgment, who would cut down the rotten tree and burn the useless chaff. When, in prison, he hears that Jesus is not doing this, he is puzzled and sends messengers to ask if Jesus is really the Messiah. Jesus sends back the message that he is fulfilling the prophet Isaiah – the passage which we hear about in today's first reading. Jesus' understanding was that healing, not punishment, was the task of the Messiah. He goes and seeks out those who need healing, both physically and spiritually. He does not wait for sinners to repent before gathering them into the kingdom; he makes the first advance. Then he turns to praising the Baptist. It is a fascinating point of speculation as to whether Jesus was himself once a disciple of John the Baptist. After all, John says he did not recognise Jesus until he saw the Spirit coming down on him. But he also says that Jesus, who came after him, has passed before him. This is a typical position of a rabbi, leading his disciples, and suggests that John had been Jesus' rabbi, then became his disciple. Jesus was fully man, and even he needed to learn as all human beings do. **John the Baptist did all he could to lead others to God. How, through our actions and attitudes, can we point others to God? How do our lives show that we are preparing for Christ's second coming?***

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 15th December 2013



First Reading: 'The Eyes of the Blind shall be Opened'

Isaiah 35:1-6. 10

Let the wilderness and the dry-lands exult, let the wasteland rejoice and bloom, let it bring forth flowers like the jonquil, let it rejoice and sing for joy. The glory of Lebanon is bestowed on it, the splendour of Carmel and Sharon; they shall see the glory of the Lord, the splendour of our God. Strengthen all weary hands, steady all trembling knees and say to all faint hearts, 'Courage! Do not be afraid. Look your God is coming, vengeance is coming, the retribution of God; he is coming to save you.' Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, the ears of the deaf unsealed, then the lame shall leap like a deer and the tongues of the dumb sing for joy, for those the Lord has ransomed shall return. They will come to Zion shouting for joy, everlasting joy on their faces; joy and gladness will go with them and sorrow and lament be ended.

Like all the other first readings of the Sundays in Advent this year, this passage is from Isaiah and rejoices in coming deliverance. Most of the Book of Isaiah was written in a dark period of Israel's history, under the threat or the reality of defeat, devastation and deportation. In this context, the promises of a Deliverer became all the more important and life-sustaining. The prophet (or prophets, for the Book of Isaiah can hardly be the work of a single person) never wavered in his/their confidence that deliverance was sure. The prophecies prepare for the coming of the Lord, but it is the coming of the Lord God of Israel which they expect. On the one hand, there is not the clarity which appears once Jesus, the Deliverer, has actually come: the prophecies do not make clear in what way or what form God would come to the rescue of his people. Would the promised Redeemer be God himself or a messenger or a herald of the end? Whatever the answer, the prophecies are certain that it is God who would be at work. On the other hand, when Jesus came it was not immediately clear whether he was God, or whether God was at work in Jesus or whether Jesus was the final prophet. This only became clear on reflection in the light of the Spirit that 'the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.'

Is the message of this reading encouraging or threatening?

Second Reading: Waiting for the Lord

James 5:7-10

Be patient, brothers, until the Lord's coming. Think of a farmer: how patiently he waits for the precious fruit of the ground until it has had the autumn rains and the spring rains! You too have to be patient; do not lose heart, because the Lord's coming will be soon. Do not make complaints against one another, brothers, so as not to be brought to judgement yourselves; the Judge is already to be seen waiting at the gates. For your example, brothers, in submitting with patience, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.

The Letter of James is rarely read on a Sunday, indeed only once in this year. Yet it is full of comforting, homely images, like the farmer waiting patiently for the autumn and spring rains, or – less comforting – the Judge waiting at the gates. Whether it was written by James, who was the leader of the Christian community at Jerusalem, is harder to determine. It may be an assemblage of the oral Wisdom teaching of this important Christian leader, written up by a disciple. In any case, the Letter was written at a time when the eschatological fever of expectation had begun to wane, when Christians no longer felt that they were in the final generation of world history, and were prepared to settle down and wait for the coming of the Lord. Indeed, in contrast with Paul's stress on the imminence of the Second Coming, the delay of the Second Coming is for James an incitement to patience. He believes that it will certainly happen, but there is plenty of opportunity beforehand for tolerance, both towards the annoying and tiresome people within the community and towards those persecuting the community from outside.

Think of the most annoying person you know. Does God love him or her?

“There is plenty of opportunity for tolerance.”

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

w: www.wednesdayword.org

e: info@wednesdayword.org