



1st Week of Advent 1 December 2024

Reflection by Mgr Daniel McHugh

“Jubilee, a path of hope in a troubled world” (Archbishop Fisichella, August ‘24)

“It’s beginning to look a lot like Christmas everywhere you go” sings Michael Bublé in a post on Instagram from Piazza del Popolo, Rome. The lights and festive tree bring change to the darkness of this time of year. I see the Cribs are being blessed here at home in public spaces like Coventry and Solihull. Children are already going to see Father Christmas to tell him what they would like from Santa who is getting ready for Christmas Eve/Day, the Birth of the Child Jesus, the time he will bring them gifts to mark that special day.

On Friday coming 6th December, we celebrate the Feast of the First Santa Clause, the Dutch rendering of the name St Nicholas. He is associated with kindness to children, and on the Continent the practice of putting sweets into the shoes of children remains to this day on 6 December. I always wanted to make a Pilgrimage to the Shrine of St Nicholas in Bari, Italy. Two years ago I had the opportunity and indeed it is well worth a visit as is the Puglia region: Nicholas was Bishop of Myra in present-day Turkey in the 300’s when he took part in the Council of Nicea. His remains were brought to Bari by Italian Sailors at the time of a take-over of Myra by the Muslim invaders in the 11th Century. Today the Basilica housing his remains is a special focus of unity between East and West hosting both Catholic and Eastern Orthodox services.

Here in our Catholic Schools there will be a special grounding of the Christmas celebrations in the Birth of the Christ Child. And in our Parishes there will be an emphasis on children too. I always remember my first Christmas in St George and St Teresa in Dorridge. The Christmas Tableau on Christmas Eve involved children putting on the Christmas Story at the beginning of the First Mass of Christmas: parents (and grandparents) were there in huge numbers and many (like myself) were moved to tears at the joy in celebrating the Birth of the Saviour. In the midst of all the carousing at Christmas time we were reminded by children of the awesome nature of what happened over 2000 years ago, and we made our way to the Christian Crib to give thanks.

The Liturgy of the Church during Advent, especially in the Gospel readings reminds us that our celebrations are not just about past events but also about the future. The Jubilee Year 2025 can be summed up in 2 key words “Hope and Forgiveness” says Archbishop Fisichella Organiser of the 2025 Jubilee. The Holy Door in St Peter’s Basilica will be opened by Pope Francis on Christmas Eve: a message says Fisichella that “*God*

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comes to meet you.” [In our Archdiocese, Archbishop Bernard will celebrate Mass for the Solemn Opening of the Jubilee Year at St Chad’s Cathedral on Sunday 29th December.]
“Without Hope we cannot grasp the essence of life”hope involves *“a personal journey for the whole Church, for humanity, which is why we are pilgrims. Especially in a time like this with so much violence.”* The other dimension of the Jubilee Year is “Forgiveness”. We speak about the Jubilee Indulgence: Fisichella added *“Indulgence is a gift from God, and the Jubilee Indulgence is the announcement of a great forgiveness given to us.”*

In the readings for the First Sunday of Advent the Church chooses to put before us the Gospel of St Luke Chapter 21 where Jesus says *“Watch yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the cares of life.”* Fr Ferlita in his reflection for the First Sunday says: *“Be watchful. That’s what Advent is all about. Be alert with God’s love, be alive with God’s light. What else can we do? What better can we do? Hear St Paul again: “May the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all.....so as to strengthen your hearts, to be blameless in holiness before our Lord and Father at the coming of Our Lord Jesus with all his holy ones.”* (1 Thessalonians 3 the second reading for the First Sunday Year C).

Yes, we prepare to celebrate the Birth of the Saviour, but also we are alert, watchful for His coming again now in our daily life and full of Hope, full of Trust that He will return again to take us with Him: I see this passage from St John’s Gospel Chapter 14 is often chosen for the Requiem Mass of a loved one:

“Jesus said to his disciples: Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God still and trust in me.....I am going now to prepare a place for you, and after I have gone and prepared you a place, I shall return to take you with me; so that where I am you may be too.” Jesus goes on to say *“I am the Way the Truth and the Life.”*: The Season of Advent and the Jubilee Year gives us a unique opportunity to reflect on the Way Jesus taught, our call to be Pilgrims of *“Hope in a troubled world.”* And to accept the Indulgence of the Church especially in the Sacrament of Penance where we embrace the Forgiveness of the Lord.

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