

HOMILY FOR THE THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

“So John said, ‘I am as Isaiah prophesied: *a voice that cries in the wilderness: make a straight way for the Lord.*”

As we further reflect on the mission of John the Baptist this Sunday it would be worthwhile to ask how, like John, we might be a voice for the Lord.

If we are to be the voice of the Lord, if we are to speak Jesus’s word to the people of our own time, then we need first of all to have pondered and digested God’s Word. For it must be God’s Word that we bear witness to in our daily lives, and not other voices that clamour for our attention and that wish to exercise dominion over our hearts.

Pope Francis in his recent encyclical “Fratelli Tutti” on Fraternity and Social Friendship dedicates Chapter 4 on a **“*Heart open to the whole world.*”** For us this would resonate with the opening verses of today’s first reading from the prophet Isaiah: **“*The Spirit of the Lord has been given to me, for the Lord has anointed me. He has sent me to bring good news to the poor, to bind up hearts that are broken; to proclaim liberty to captives, freedom to those in prison; to proclaim a year of favour from the Lord.*”**

The gift of the Spirit which we have been given seeks to create from the many languages of the human family, one voice to profess one faith. The Holy Spirit works within each one of us to bring to completion the good work which God has begun in us...9 (Example of a garden with all different flowers and plants. The Holy Spirit is like the rain that falls on each of these species adapting itself to their uniqueness and enabling them to grow and blossom each according to its kind.)

Pope Francis asks us to show an openness to others because in so doing we offer reciprocal gifts. He writes: ***The arrival of those who are different, coming from other ways of life and cultures, can be a gift, for “the stories of migrants are always stories of an encounter between individuals and between cultures. For the communities and societies to which they come, migrants bring an opportunity for enrichment and the integral development of all.”***

This is why we need to communicate with each other, to discover the gifts of each person, to promote that which unites us, and to regard our differences as an opportunity to grow in mutual respect. Patience and trust are called for in such dialogue, permitting individuals, families and communities to hand on the value of their own culture and welcome the good that comes from others' experience."

Sometimes we need to be challenged to move out of our comfort zone and to embrace what is different and perhaps uncomfortable to our own understanding. We see how John the Baptist challenged his contemporaries to see how God was about to reveal Himself in a new and wonderful way.

Today we are very much aware of issues that need to be tackled on a global scale. The present pandemic is helping us to realise that all the countries of the world must work together to overcome Covid19. (SADNESS IN HEARING REPORTS) Next year Glasgow will host a very important Climate Conference and once again we realise that all nations and communities must work together to protect our common home.

When individuals, communities and nations work together the results are obvious: Pope Francis speaks of reciprocal gifts: ***"Without encountering and relating to differences, it is hard to achieve a clear and complete understanding even of ourselves and of our native land. Other cultures are not "enemies" from which we need to protect ourselves, but differing reflections, of the inexhaustible richness of human life. Seeing ourselves from the perspective of another, of one who is different, we can better recognise our own unique features and those of our culture: its richness, its possibilities, and its limitations."***

For us as Christ's disciples the call to foster fraternity and social friendship is all the more urgent for we now await the Day of the Lord. We know for sure that the Lord will come in glory to judge the living and the dead and we need to prepare for that Day. Let us receive the words of today's communion antiphon with great joy:

"Say to the faint of heart: Be strong and do not fear. Behold, our God will come, and He will save us."