

## ADVENT 2 YEAR B

Today we think about two types of homecoming, past coming and future coming.

In the 1st reading Isaiah is consoling the Jews in exile in Babylon. They have been held captive there for 60 years and Isaiah is reassuring them that their time of exile is about to come to an end, and that they will be brought back to Israel by the power of a loving God.

Isaiah does not hold back as he reminds them that they are there due to their past sinfulness, but their sins have been forgiven and their time of exile will soon be over.

Isaiah's vision is that God will be leading them home in a grand procession in which valleys and mountains will be levelled and a highway created to ensure a safe journey.

Whilst this prophecy was eventually fulfilled when the Persians conquered the Babylonians and freed the Jewish captives.

Theologians saw a second prophecy here, the coming of Jesus the Messiah, proclaimed by John the Baptist, and predicted by the words of Isaiah in the 1<sup>st</sup> reading

In the second reading Peter reminds us that the 1<sup>st</sup> coming of Jesus is only the beginning and that the salvation promised by Jesus will not be completed until His 2<sup>nd</sup> coming.

Whilst Matthew & Luke start their Gospels by giving us a brief account of Jesus birth, Marks gospel begins with today's passage at the very beginning of Jesus saving mission as John the Baptist came out of the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sin. We hear how John foretold the coming of Jesus as he said:

Someone is following me, someone more powerful that John was not fit to undo his sandal strap. Someone who will baptise with the Holy Spirit.

John's baptism by immersion in the river Jordan during which the Jews were to repent their sins was something unfamiliar to them. They did undergo a form of ritual cleansing with water in a ceremony called mikveh during which they poured water over their heads, symbolically washing away their sins, but the style of John's baptism was considered only useful to the Gentiles. However John was convinced that even the chosen people, the Jews, were in need of true repentance and renewal of life to prepare themselves for the coming of the Messiah. Hence their need for his baptism.

In John's baptism three aspects were necessary,

- 1 Examination of conscience, and to admit one's sins to oneself
- 2 True repentance, for the wrong done to others,
- 3 Confession to God for one's sins, asking for forgiveness.

Very similar in fact to our form of reconciliation.

The important aspect of reconciliation is to forgive others, as we recite in the Lord's Prayer forgive us our sins as we forgive those who have sinned against us. How can we expect forgiveness if we don't forgive others.

There is a saying "practice what you preach" how can we expect others to live good lives unless we give them the right example.

John certainly followed this rule, he lived what he preached.

He lived for years in the desert. In its solitude he heard the voice of God and had the courage of his convictions.

During these days of Advent we are invited to prepare for Christmas. This is a time for reflection and personal renewal for the coming of Jesus into our lives

Today in the 2nd reading, Peter reminds us of God's great desire to come into our lives. However we can only open up fully to God's grace if we are prepared to open our ways to enhance genuine conversion.

For God to come fully to us, we need to go to him, to go to him in prayer and action.

There are many opportunities to do this through daily mass and the sacraments, through quiet prayer at home or while engaged in the ordinary circumstances of our lives, and offer them up to God.

John the Baptist attracted people to him by his humility and his conduct. Let us accept Jesus as our personal Savior and Lord during this Advent/Christmas season behaving as true Christians in our daily conduct, with a charitable outlook for the welfare of others.

As true disciples of Jesus we should always remember our responsibility to be evangelists, spreading the good news amongst our family and friends, perhaps encouraging them to come to our parish reconciliation next weekend.

John the Baptist invites us to turn this Advent season into a real spiritual homecoming, for ourselves and others, by making the necessary preparations for the arrival of the Savior, and his entrance into our lives.