

OUR LADY, STAR OF THE SEA, WEYMOUTH

HOMILY FOR THE 1ST SUNDAY IN ADVENT (B)

Isaiah 63. 16-17, 64.1,3-8; Psalm 79; 1 Cor 1.3-9; Mark 13.33-37

I was having dinner with some friends recently who meet weekly with some of their Christian friends. They truly are experiencing Jesus truth when He talks about family.

When Jesus talks of family in the Gospels He isn't primarily talking about the so called nuclear family. He is saying that we, as members of the church, are a family. He tells us elsewhere that those who do the will of his father are his family. There are so many of you involved with our church and each other in various ways; thank you. However, if you're not – get involved (there is a Parish handbook now available which lists all the work being done by the faithful within the parish); meet up with your (church) family during the week. We all need to spend time with Christian friends, who are our family, if we are to progress in our journey of faith.

Last week Father Stephen highlighted how in relation to helping the world, both practically and morally, we are either part of the problem, or of the solution. Let's be part of the solution. I must say, though, that whenever I am up here looking out, I honestly feel moved looking at everyone who comes to Mass. Maybe there is stuff going on in some peoples' lives that is currently immobilising you; but on the whole, I bet you are part of the solution.

Our first reading today is from the 63rd chapter of Isaiah, and I think of it as a "father sandwich"! (Everyone should read this chapter when back at home.)

Isaiah starts with "you Lord are our Father". And throughout this section we hear how our Father doesn't force us, but He does guide us. He exemplifies (listen all you dads out there!) how a loving father should act. He nurtures and grows us, He allows us to learn from our own mistakes, He always has his arms open to us.

Now, remember God our Father won't force us, just as He didn't force the Israelites. So, we hear Isaiah crying out "Oh that you would tear the heavens open and come down..."

I asked the other week whether we desire God, or are we placid spectators? For anyone over the age of 25, lets recover the passion of our youth! You see Isaiah is crying out to his Father because he recognises that the people have withered like leaves. He knows that due to their sins and their turning away from God has resulted in suffering – because their Father, who is God our Father, won't force them or us to be with Him. Away from God we get blown around by the wind (the cultures of our time).

During this time of Advent, when we really must examine what we are thinking and doing —do our ways of behaving draw us away from or towards our Father? We have a chance to exchange our often-rebellious wills, for his perfect one! We have 4 beautiful weeks of anticipation to examine our consciences, say sorry, and the cry out to God to help us. Because the end of Isaiah's Father sandwich is the confirmation that "You are our Father, we the clay, you the potter!" And when we allow God our Father to guide us- "You guide those who keep your ways in mind"- things really do change.

Let's acknowledge our need for God, we sang it 4 times 5 minutes ago "Let your face shine on us and we shall be saved".

And with a little stirring up of our hearts, we can think that Paul is speaking to us.

"I never stop thanking God for all the graces you have received. You are rich in gifts, especially your preachers and teachers(!)... your witness to Christ is strong, and you will not be without any of the gifts of the Spirit"

Here's encouragement. A witness isn't someone standing on Speakers' Corner with a placard. A witness is someone who quietly speaks and lives the truth. We can all do this quietly at home, work, in the pub etc. just by how we talk and react to situations. If asked, gently reply with why you behave in a certain way, leave the rest to God; His Spirit can work in that other person's heart. Your job is just to witness, which may or not involve further actions.

I hope I do some things for my family simply because I love them. And when you love, you give; and paradoxically the more you give, the more you receive. So, Paul finishes this section with a gorgeous promise that whilst you are doing these things "Our Lord Jesus will keep us steady until the last day, because God has joined us to his Son (pause), and God is faithful.

I won't say much about today's Gospel except that it continues the message we have heard over the previous weeks. Firstly, stay awake, be ready, we really don't know when we will be called to meet God face to face. Secondly, we have been given gifts to enable us to do different jobs, and God expects us to use them (remember Father Stephen gave us a useful list the other week, starting with the gift of life itself, let's remember that life is a gift. Then things like being able to pray, to worship, to forgive, to be merciful. Some may have a gift of healing, or teaching; others gifts of flower arranging, hospitality e.g. coffee making.... Think about what you are good at – I used to be a cleaner – and then thank God for this and use it however you can).

Remember all the while, that if we use our gifts with an awareness within us that they are God given, then that in itself is keeping us awake – we will be ready and awake when Jesus comes!

You wonderful people, make a commitment to cry out to God during Advent; He won't force you so ask Him and allow Him to change you (like the potter and the clay). Let His face shine on you, exchange gifts — His will for yours — then that light in you will reflect onto others. Live by using your gifts and thank God for them. That will keep you awake and aware of His presence. And know you are joined to Jesus Christ. You are joined to Christ. Now that is a Christmas present.

Rev Jonathan de Kretser