

2nd Sunday Advent (A)

- Do you remember those first photos of earth from the Apollo 8 mission?
- That was over 50 years ago, more precisely, December 24th, 1968.
- The astronauts were the first human beings to see the earth from outside.
- As they gazed down on the earth from space, they (& I quote) "realised as never before that we are one family, with spaceship Earth as our common home."
- One of them said later: 'The first day in space, we all pointed to our own countries. The second day, we pointed to our continents.
- By the third day, we were aware of only one Earth.'
- The prophets had the same kind of high & wide vision, a vision of how things could be. But how real is that vision?
- When one reads a history book, or even just the daily newspaper, at times one can easily be ashamed to be human.
- What is the story of humanity? Wars & more wars.
- So much ignorance & prejudice; so many dead; so many tears; so much fear.
- The world is drenched in blood. Should not all hope be abandoned?
- As for the wolf & the lamb living together, often two neighbours, or even two members of the same family, have a falling out & refuse to talk to one another.
- Are not these great visions of peace & harmony among all peoples just a utopian fairy tale? No, they're not.
- They correspond to the deepest longings of the human heart, & point to God's ultimate goal for us.
- These visions nurture our spirits & our hearts.
- They offer us hope when we are close to despair, & courage when we are tempted to give up on life.
- These visions fuel our deepest aspirations, & give us the energy to overcome great obstacles & painful setbacks.
- The prophets lived in the real world, & were just as dismayed by its horrors & injustices as we are.
- Yet they had a dream of a new world, a world free from injustice & war.
- Through faith in God they were able to rise above their disillusionment.
- What saved them from despair was their messianic vision & their sense of our capacity for a change of heart, for repentance.
- History is not a blind alley.
- There is always a way out – through repentance, through turning to God.
- The beautiful vision of the peaceful Kingdom, in which all violence has been overcome & all people live in loving unity with nature, calls for its realisation in our daily lives.

- Instead of being an escapist dream, it challenges us to anticipate what it promises & we are called to Trust in the coming of the kingdom/reign of God & in our empowered capacity to promote that kingdom.
- Every time we forgive someone who has hurt us, every time we make a person smile, every time we show compassion to a suffering person, take care of animals, prevent pollution, & work for peace & justice among peoples & nations, we are making the vision come true.
- We need to keep the vision before us.
- Then it will give us new energy to live it out, right where we are.
- Instead of encouraging us to escape from real life, this beautiful vision summons us to get involved.
- We need to open our hearts to the dream which the prophets cherished of a world rid of evil by human effort & filled with the grace of God.
- Jesus had a word for the new world. He called it 'The Kingdom of God.'
- He inaugurated that Kingdom.
- He wants his followers to dedicate themselves to the building of that kingdom.
- Ordinary people help to spread that Kingdom by being kind, truthful, honest, just, & so on.
- Even though it is a struggle that we will never win completely, the struggle is good for us.
- It awakens everything that is best & precious within us.
- Isaiah's vision lives on in our midst as a task for today & a promise for tomorrow.
- Last week we saw that Advent is **not** just a time of waiting & being still, but a time to be awake & alert to the presence of God & the issues of our time.
- Today's Gospel focuses on John the Baptist.
- Matthew sums up the preaching of John the Baptist with a call to repentance: *'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is close at hand'*.
- Repentance is at the very heart of the Gospel - to repent means to open our minds and hearts to see things in a different way.
- First of all it means to see God in a different way – as the Father revealed by Jesus, the Father who loves, who forgives, who wants to heal and release, and enable everyone without exception to love the way we are meant to love.
- If we see God in this way we will look at ourselves and others differently, and we will learn to 'treat each other in the same friendly way as Christ treated you'.
- Today's readings take us a step further...not only are we to be awake & alert, but also people who are moving forward, who are building the kingdom.