

Sermon 2023 12 03 Text

The name of God, Creator, Redeemer, and Companion on the Journey. Amen.

=====

One of the things that used to annoy me as a Theological Student was dyspeptic old priests who used to grumble about the superior state of theological education and preparation for the priesthood that had existed when they were trained.

Looking back almost 40 years since I started at St Francis College, I realise that, in some ways, I have become one of those priests.

One of the changes that I supported and constantly celebrate is the ordination of women.

But 40 years ago, those in training were exclusively male, and predominantly single. We were required to live on campus. And since we spent our days in focussed study and prayer a coo was employed to provide us with our sustaining three meals a day.

Well, on weekdays – four meals a day – since morning tea was also quite substantial and filling.

One year the principal thought we should pay some observance to Lent by a significantly restrained morning tea. We argued him down to the position that this was entirely appropriate except on the Feast Days of Saints of the Church. His agreement with this sent us scurrying to research the obscure saints of the church.

My recollection is that there were only about 2 or 3 days when we could not find some obscure saint to celebrate and protect our morning teas.

=====

In medieval times a similar practice occurred on the days of the celebration of the major Saints. The Lord of the manor was required to provide a substantial meal in celebration of those Saints. Hence their days of remembrance became Feast Days of the Church. Further, the Lord of the manor was required to give the people of the manor a day off to attend worship, so they became Holy days or holidays.

=====

As the world evolved, we gathered a set of days together so that employees could have a set time of rest, reflection, and recreation without disturbing the workflow of a year.

=====

We now look forward to those holidays and the marvellous impact of those few weeks of freedom and the impact they have on us.

You forget about the daily everyday routine that can hold you fast in the wheel tracks of the road. They become weeks of you choosing the ordering of your day; giving you a freedom to choose, to dream, to consider possibilities and to lift your eyes from immediate confrontation, and to spend each moment with quiet minds.

=====

The anticipation of the pile of “must do’s” and “I need it now” can tire us before we even return to the pile of rocks and the constantly swinging hammer.

=====

Now the glories of the celebration, the Holy Day, of the Feast of Christ the King, have been replaced by a gentler version of Lent. We enter a time for reflection, a time for remembering that the journey of the Christian must include a reminder of the darkness so that we can celebrate the light.

=====

The “watching” of the season of Advent is a capsule of contradiction.

We hold the memory of the light of Christ, but we also hold it against the reminder that the Christ light must come to us again and draw us out of the darkness. The seasons of light, the holy days, have completed another cycle and we have returned to that place of confrontation where we need to engage with our shortfalls; where we need to bind the wounds, we have inflicted on ourselves as we have wilfully walked into the darkness.

=====

But Advent also reminds us that we never walk without hope, and with each passing week of the Advent the liberating light grows stronger as we add one candle and then another.

=====

Our Advent wreath builds the story and builds our capacity to see the story of our liberation; of our ‘holy days’.

=====

The millions of flickering candles of Christ the King have been extinguished and the journey starts again.

It starts with a small soft note, a single candle reignites the capacity for vision.

The end of our holidays has marked the time of a new beginning of our search for knowledge and of our own shortfalls.

But each Sunday in Advent illuminates our life a little more. Each Sunday we add another pinprick of light to stand against the darkness that we have created by our wilful desire to control our own destiny.

=====

The Advent call of “prepare the way” becomes a call for each of us to turn our focus inwardly. How have we been too self-focussed and forgotten to look to God, forgotten to look to the desperate physical, emotional and spiritual needs of others and to look away from our lives of perceived self-satisfaction to our own desperate physical, emotional and spiritual needs.

=====

Advent calls us back to that well-worn path of faithfulness, generosity, and love.

It calls us out of ourselves so that we might see our world objectively – not from our own view of self interest or our ignorance of God and others – but into that focus for better

selves; a better, more generous reaction to others; and a reopening of our hearts and minds to the light and love of God.

Advent calls us back to a way things used to be. Advent calls us to reminisce and seek that better, simpler, more generous loving world for ourselves and others.

In the early dawning light of the coming again of the Christ we tentatively place feet back onto the path that leads to endless hope, endless joy, and eternal salvation.

=====