

Advent 2C (3)

Some years ago at the time of the enquiry into the Iraqi war it emerged that scant consideration was given to the post-invasion planning and restructure. The result of such an oversight was chaos and loss of innocent life including the lives of many children.

There is an old saying which goes: 'failing to prepare is preparing to fail'. The church in her wisdom has designated seasons throughout the year to allow us prepare for major feasts. As Lent is to Easter, so Advent is to Christmas.

The message of John the Baptist rings loud and clear: “prepare ye a way for the Lord”. The people as a whole had a premonition that something exciting was in the air. In Matthew's Gospel, for instance, it says that 'a feeling of expectancy had come over the people. 'However, expecting something is one thing but being ready to receive it is another.

Confessing their sins was a prerequisite for welcoming the Messiah. The same applies to us. It is true that very few people go to confession these days even before a major feast like Christmas. When we go to the doctor complaining of persistent pain don't we feel mightily relieved after a medical examination when he gives us a clean bill of health? Has any disease settled in our souls which is keeping us from a closer union with Jesus.

John the Baptist in his own person was a striking example of what preparedness was all about. He lived a simple life out in the desert devoid of worldly trappings. His food was minimal. His clothes, the mere skin of a camel. Nothing about his lifestyle and person prevented him from recognising Jesus when he emerged on the scene.

Quoting Isaiah John said “every mountain will be laid low”

If there is a mountain of unconfessed sin in my life, perhaps, this Advent, I could do something about it. What about sins against the eight commandment? Am I given to nosiness or being overly inquisitive about other people's lives and fail to notice my own failings? Jesus says: Why observe the splinter in your brother's eye and fail to see the log in your own? Do I give way to tittle-tattle about others? Self-denial in this area is a real tonic for the soul.

"Every valley will be filled in". A valley could be described as an emptiness in my life. Life without God is empty. Material acquisitions can take the place of God and give me the illusion of happiness.

"Winding ways need to be straightened". Perhaps I need straightening out. Do I shoulder my full responsibilities as a father, a mother, a priest or do I always excuse myself when things go hay-wire? Advent is a time for stepping up to the mark and not dodging issues any longer.

No doubt over the next couple of weeks we will be stocking up for Christmas. Over this period let us also take stock of our spiritual lives and put Christ back into our Advent, so that we will be ready to welcome Him with joy at Christmas.