

Advent 2C

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 re-construction. The result of such an oversight was chaos and huge loss of innocent life.

There is an old saying which goes: 'failing to prepare is preparing to fail'. The church in her wisdom has designated two seasons throughout the year which are penitential in character in anticipation of major feasts. As Lent is to Easter, so Advent is to Christmas.

The message of John the Baptist rings out: "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 for it is quite another.

Confessing their sins to the Baptist 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 feel physically out of sorts for an extended period we know it's time to go and have a check-up. When our spiritual and moral life is getting a bit jagged at the edges we need to examine our conscience and avail ourselves of the sacrament of Penance. Has any disease settled in my soul which would advocate I join the cue for John's baptism of repentance?

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 very basic. He was clad in the skin of a camel. Nothing about his lifestyle and person prevented him from recognising Jesus when he came into view.

Quoting Isaiah, John said “every mountain will be laid low”
If there is a mountain of unacknowledged sin in my life, Advent is a time to 'lay it low'. What about the eighth commandment? Is there a valley of emptiness in my life that manifests itself in me being overly inquisitive about the goings on in other people's lives whilst conveniently overlooking the inconsistencies in my own? Jesus says: Why observe the splinter in your brother's eye and fail to see the log in your own? And then there's the tenth commandment – *'thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's goods'*. Pampering myself with material things could also be indicative of an absence of God in my heart. Life without God is like an empty gorge – it needs to be filled in.

“Winding ways need to be straightened”. Is there anything which needs levelling in my life? Do I shoulder my full responsibilities as a father, a mother, a teenager, a priest or do I always excuse myself when things go wrong? Advent is a time for stepping up to the mark and being straight with myself and with others.

No doubt over the next couple of weeks we will be stocking up for Christmas. Over this period let us also take stock and open our hearts and minds to Christ's saving message in readiness for the pending feast of feasts.