

Advent 2C

Some years ago at the time of the enquiry into the controversial 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. Worse still, no one in power at the time took responsibility for the war and its aftermath.

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. We all expect to die but will we be ready for it.

Confessing their sins to the Baptist was a prerequisite for people welcoming Jesus. The same applies to us. It is true that very few people go to confession these days even before a major feast like Christmas. Has any major sin settled in my soul which would make it incumbent on me to do something about it this Advent? Unlike the architects of the Iraqi war, do I take responsibility for my sins?

John the Baptist in his own person was a striking example of what preparedness was all about. He lived a rather severe life out in the desert devoid of worldly trappings. His food fell far short of 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” Is there is a mountain of pride in my life which keeps me and God at a distance? Advent is a time to 'lay it low'. Is there a valley of emptiness in my life which incites in me wanton curiosity or nosiness about goings-on in other people's lives whilst conveniently overlooking the gaping discrepancies in my own? Jesus says: 'Why observe the splinter in your brother's or sister's eye and fail to see the log in your own'? "Every valley will be filled in". Life without God is like a yawning emptiness – it needs to be filled in with prayer and good works.

“Winding ways need to be straightened”. Is there anything which needs straightening out in my life? Do I shoulder my full responsibilities as a father, a mother, a wife, a husband, a teenager, a single person, a priest or do I always excuse myself when things go pear-shaped? A good example of this was the harrowing news on the paper yesterday about poor little six year old Arthur who suffered and died so cruelly at the hands of those who were supposed to love and care for him. 'Nobody loves me', he said a short time before his life was cruelly ended. That says it all.

No doubt over the next couple of weeks we will be stocking up for Christmas. In preparing a way for the Lord let's do a little spiritual stock-taking as well in readiness for the coming feast of Christ's birth.