

OUR LADY, STAR OF THE SEA, WEYMOUTH
HOMILY FOR THE SECOND SUNDAY IN ADVENT
6th DECEMBER 2009.

“Prepare a way for the Lord, make his paths straight.”

So said the voice crying in the wilderness, the voice of John the Baptist

On this second Sunday of Advent the Gospel turns our minds from the second coming of our Lord Jesus in the future to his coming in the past, a very precise time in the past, the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius as Roman emperor and all the other rulers and officials that Luke names to make his point that Jesus and John were persons in our history as well.

Today’s Gospel refers not to the birth of Jesus but to his coming to John for Baptism at the start of his public ministry. However the command to prepare a way for the Lord is appropriate in Advent as we prepare for the coming of our Lord now, this Christmas 2009, Jesus’ coming in the present day.

John was quoting from the prophet, Isaiah, who used the image of the way as a symbol for the action of God in leading his people to salvation.

In the Exodus God made a way for his people through the Red Sea to escape from Egypt.

Isaiah is promising a way for the Lord to lead his people out of exile in Babylon.

This is the event described by Baruch in our first reading.

Jesus called himself the Way. The faith of the early Christians was called the Way.

The image of the way is a good one.

Motorways and railways are reliable modes of transport because they do exactly what John demanded. They go across valleys on embankments or viaducts, through or under hills in cuttings and tunnels. They are straight and smooth. There are no obstructions.

A person who is in perfect union with God has made a spiritual motorway between their soul and God.

The way that John has in mind is more like a bridleway – steep climbs, deep ruts filled with mud and water, rough surfaces, following a winding and indirect course.

Most people have bridleways like these between their souls and God.

John the Baptist is challenging us to make a way for the Lord Jesus to come to us so that he can lead us to salvation.

Advent is usually understood as “coming”.

The Latin word literally means to reach or arrive at, so Advent is about completing a journey, and journeys are made along ways.

Our Lord Jesus is the one making the journey.

He is coming to us. He is making makes the move.

Our responsibility is to give him an easy journey.

As we prayed in our opening prayer we must “Remove the things that hinder us from receiving Christ with joy.”

This means removing all the obstacles that come between us and our Lord, the mountains and hills of pride and self-assurance; the rough places of anger, bitterness and refusal to forgive; the valleys of negligence and ignorance

Ignorance is not a term of abuse. It simply means “not knowing” but it can be a major obstacle in the way.

Ignorance prevents us from recognising the other obstacles.

It can even prevent us recognising our need for God.

If we see no need for God we won't even start clearing the way for him.

There are two means of dealing with this problem.

The easiest means to clear a way is to send in a bulldozer.

The spiritual equivalent is the sacrament of reconciliation, confession.

I don't want to trivialise the sacrament but, properly used, it is the quickest and most effective way of clearing the obstacles from our spiritual way. We need to confess everything that comes between us and God and hinders us from receiving him with joy

The second means is to see more clearly both the way and the Lord who is coming along it by reading the Bible.

Today is Bible Sunday when the Church invites us to rediscover this great means of grace.

Properly used the Bible, the Word of God, will tell us all that we need to know, not everything that we want to know but everything that we need to know about our Lord's coming.

It is not a map, journey planner or a satnav giving precise directions and time of arrival.

The Bible is the word of the Lord guiding us and telling us what to look out for.

So this Advent let's respond to John's challenge and prepare a way for the Lord.

Let's pray that we may hasten the Lord's coming and be ready to greet him when he comes.

Rev Geoff Carey