

SERMON – ADVENT 1A 2025.

As you may know the Pope is in the midst of his pastoral journey to Turkey and Lebanon and very appropriately The Pope Video prayer for December has just been released. It is dedicated specifically to the Christian minorities who live in the midst of war. In fact, in this last prayer intention of the year, the Holy Father asks that we pray “that Christians living in areas of war or conflict, especially in the Middle East, might be seeds of peace, reconciliation and hope.” He is the first to do so, reciting a prayer to the “God of peace,” in the video produced and distributed by the Pope's Worldwide Prayer Network, lets watch it now.

VIDEO.

As you may know the Holy Father is in Turkey at the moment, shortly to travel to Lebanon. He is in Turkey to mark the anniversary of the Council of Nicae in 325, its 1700 anniversary, when the main tenets of the Christian faith were established, that of the incarnation and the trinity- it is largely the same creed we still say in this holy mass.

It is the beginning of the season of Advent, I think we are all familiar with the images and reminders of Advent in Church, the colour purple, seen in my purple vestments and the purple veils, the new advent wreath with its one lit purple candle, and the fact that we don't sing or say the Gloria, all meant to be reminders that this is a season of preparation, a time of getting ready, 4 weeks of preparing for Xmas, as we heard Jesus say in the Gospel reading, to stay awake, to be prepared. All that we have here in Church is a reminder to prepare spiritually for Xmas, to prepare prayerfully, not just to prepare as the world around us does by buying and things and consuming lots of food and drink. Not that there is anything wrong in celebrating Xmas and its approach in such a way, but here today in Church we are reminded to also prepare in that most important way, by thinking of Christ, by reminding ourselves that Christ is the real reason for all of our celebrating, that the child born, as described in the great creed of Nicaea, was God's son, begotten not made.

And it is in this Advent season, at least in these first weeks of it, that we are reminding of something crucial in our faith, that we believe the story of Jesus Christ is not yet finished, there is still a final act to be played out, that we believe Jesus is going to return, on that last day, the day of Judgement, which St. Paul mentioned in his reading today. He said, speaking to those 1st Christians in the city of Corinth, may

“He keep you steady and without blame until the last day, the day of our Lord Jesus Christ,”

It was the same last Sunday when we heard of our Lord speaking of his return on the last day, speaking of the great and terrible events that will accompany it, but for us not to lose heart, but to be well prepared for that day, whenever it may be. So Advent is as much about this belief of Christ's return as it is about his first coming, which is described to us in the Nativity stories. This is something that we have to remind ourselves of every year, because it is so easy just to reduce advent and Xmas to those lovely stories of Our Lord's birth, which although so wonderful are not everything, for they only tell the first part of the story, that story that continued at that 1st Easter when that child who had grown to be a man, freely suffered and died so that our sins might be forgiven, and how that man will return one day, the last day, the day that is yet to happen.

It is so important not to reduce advent and Xmas to just a story or just to the spending of money and celebrating, because then the message of advent loses all its power and meaning. Advent should be more than anything about

HOPE, the hope that our faith gives us, that God loves us, that he loved the world so much that sent his son to save us from suffering, sin and death, and that Son will return one day to take us into his Kingdom for ever and ever. That HOPE which is expressed so beautifully in the creed of Nicaea, established 1700 years ago.

This message gives us real hope, it gives us hope in the midst of all the trials we face, it gives us hope when we are overwhelmed with worry and anxiety about ourselves or our loved ones and friends, when we are worried about our jobs, about whether we can properly care for our families, of when we are overwhelmed at the violence we so often see around us. Our Hope is this - that the fate of this world is not in the hands of wicked or violent men, the fate of this world, our fate is in the hands of our loving God, whose Son, Jesus Christ will one day return to take us back to heaven to be with him for ever. What a wonderful hope this is, a hope to give us strength and optimism even amidst the worst problems and worries we might face. It is a hope needed most of all by those persecute Christian communities which we heard the Holy Father speak of in the video we have watched.

Advent is also a penitential season, when we prepare for Xmas by repenting of sin, by renewing our lives of faith in penance. The forgiveness/mercy Christ offers is always available to us. If it has been many years since you made a confession, make one this advent, approach God for mercy and forgiveness, if for no other reason, so that you in your turn are strengthened to offer that same mercy to others, so let's make use of that wonderful sacrament of reconciliation. Advent should also be a time of prayer, let's try to make it a time of prayerful preparation for xmas, for it is so easy to just get sucked into all the earthly things happening, spending money, shopping, presents, parties etc, make use of those advent booklets that were available in church last week, use them for daily prayer-there are still some of them at the back of Church.

Finally, let us find meaning from our advent wreath, with the one candle now lit, it speaks to us of the light of Christ shining upon this darkened world, the light of Christ shining in our lives banishing the darkness of sin, shame anxiety and fear, and giving us hope, giving us hope to believe that Our Lord and Saviour whose birth we are about to celebrate, will return to us on that last day. These candles speak of the real living hope we have, so let us be well prepared, let us be alert and watchful, let us be watchful in prayer and in worship, ready to greet our Saviour on the day when he returns to us. Amen.