

ADVENT 3 – 2020  
Isaiah 61:1-2;10-11  
1 Thess 5:16-24  
Jn 1:6-8;19-28

When life is difficult we all value words of reassurance. Isaiah gave his people in exile words of assurance that God had not abandoned them. More than that, he said that God would restore their good name and would redeem them. In return, because salvation is linked to being in a right relationship with God, the people were expected to live lives of self-giving love serving God and others in preparation for that great event.

Advent is the season for Christians to make preparation for the celebration of the birth of God's chosen Messiah, the Word made flesh. As part of this preparation we connect with John the Baptist, who using words of Isaiah, describes himself as a voice crying in the wilderness, clearing the way for the Messiah to reveal his glory.

The Jewish leadership at the time of Jesus and John the Baptist were suspicious of any new movements, especially any that predicted the coming of the end times. They approached John to ask him whether he was baptising people because he was the Messiah. After all, he was the son of one of their priests. John responded by saying that he was not the Messiah and was only baptising with water, so implying that there would be a more important baptism to follow. John was creating the conditions in which the person who *was* the Messiah, could be announced and recognised by the people.

When Jesus revealed God, not everyone among the Jewish community recognised his true identity. The Jewish leadership rejected him, turned on him and eventually arranged for him to be crucified, following this with the persecution of Christians who acknowledged Jesus as God's chosen Messiah. The faithful Christians who were persecuted were comforted by St Paul, the other apostles and the author of the Book of Revelation.

In the troubled times for the Church following Jesus' resurrection, St Paul wrote to the Thessalonian Christians and gave them important guidelines in order to stand firm in the faith they had been given. These guidelines are ones that we too can follow. St Paul told his readers to rejoice no matter what life threw at them. Why would he say this? Because unlike the dictatorship of whatever secular ideology is currently fashionable or unlike the helplessness of paganism, faithful Christians have nothing to fear because Jesus is Lord.

Paul said we must be prayerful at all times. This doesn't mean badgering God endlessly with requests but being aware of his presence in everything that we think and do. We must be thankful *for* everything and *in* every situation. We are to test everything we are told and hold fast to that which is good, and above all, try our utmost to avoid evil at all times. If we follow St Paul's advice we will have a solid foundation upon which we can build our relationship with God, and as the prophets and Jesus made clear, salvation is linked to being in a right relationship with God. Advent is a time to review how we stand in this regard.

Msgr Harry Entwistle

December 2020