

PARISH OF BLESSED JAMES BELL

*Serving St Benedict's, St Mary's & St Oswald's,
Warrington*



2nd Sunday of Advent (B)

6 December 2020

Entrance Procession

Music: Hark! a herald voice is calling (6th century)

Lighting of the Advent Wreath

Penitential Act

Music: Advent Wreath Service – John Schiavone

Collect

With tender comfort and transforming power
you come into our midst,
O God of mercy and might.
Make ready a way in the wilderness,
clear a straight path in our hearts,
and form us into a repentant people,
that the advent of your Son
may find us watchful
and eager for the glory he reveals.
We ask this through him whose coming is certain,
whose day draws near: your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ,
who lives and reigns with you
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
God for ever and ever.

R. Amen.

Liturgy of the Word

First Reading

(Isaiah 40: 1-5, 9-11)

A reading from the prophet Isaiah

'Console my people, console them'
says your God.

'Speak to the heart of Jerusalem
and call to her
that her time of service is ended,
that her sin is atoned for,
that she has received from the hand of the Lord
double punishment for all her crimes.'

A voice cries, 'Prepare in the wilderness
a way for the Lord.

Make a straight highway for our God
across the desert.

Let every valley be filled in,
every mountain and hill be laid low.

Let every cliff become a plain,
and the ridges a valley;

then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed
and all mankind shall see it;
for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.'

Go up on a high mountain,
joyful messenger to Zion.
Shout with a loud voice,
joyful messenger to Jerusalem.
Shout without fear,
say to the towns of Judah,
'Here is your God.'

Here is the Lord coming with power,
his arm subduing all things to him.
The prize of his victory is with him,
his trophies all go before him.
He is like a shepherd feeding his flock,
gathering lambs in his arms,
holding them against his breast
and leading to their rest the mother ewes.

The word of the Lord.

R. Thanks be to God.

Psalm 85

**Lord, let us see your kindness,
and grant us your salvation.**

- 1 I will hear what God proclaims;
the Lord – for he proclaims peace to his people.
Near indeed is his salvation
to those who fear him,
glory dwelling in our land.
- 2 Kindness and truth shall meet;
justice and peace shall kiss.
Truth shall spring out of the earth,
and justice shall look down from heaven.

Gospel Acclamation *(Setting by Owen Alstott)*

Gospel

(Mark 1: 1-8)

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Mark

R. Glory to you, O Lord.

The beginning of the Good News about Jesus Christ,
the Son of God. It is written in the book of the prophet
Isaiah: Look, I am going to send my messenger before
you; he will prepare your way. A voice cries in the
wilderness: Prepare a way for the Lord, make his paths
straight.

and so it was that John the Baptist appeared in the
wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for
the forgiveness of sins. All Judaea and all the people of
Jerusalem made their way to him, and as they were
baptised by him in the river Jordan they confessed
their sins. John wore a garment of camel-skin, and he
lived on locusts and wild honey. In the course of his
preaching he said, 'Someone is following me, someone
who is more powerful than I am, and I am not fit to
kneel down and undo the strap of his sandals. I have
baptised you with water, but he will baptise you with
the Holy Spirit.'

The Gospel of the Lord.

R. Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Homily

Bidding Prayers

Liturgy of the Eucharist

Preparation of the Gifts

Music: Comfort, Comfort Now My People – John Bell

Prayer over the Offerings

Be pleased, O Lord,
with our humble prayers and offerings,
and, since we have no merits to plead our cause,
come, we pray, to our rescue
with the protection of your mercy.
Through Christ our Lord.

R. Amen.

Eucharistic Acclamations

Holy, Holy – People's Mass (Vermulst)

The Mystery of Faith

**We proclaim your Death, O Lord,
and profess your Resurrection
until you come again.**

Communion Rite

Music: Lulla Loel – Chameleon

Prayer after Communion

Lord,
you have nourished us with the food of life.
Through our partaking of this sacrament
teach us to judge wisely the things of earth
and to cherish those of heaven.
Through Christ our Lord.

R. Amen.

Concluding Rite

Distribution of Communion

Music: Be still and know – Keith Duke

Acknowledgements

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Reflection on the Gospel

By Fr Chris Thomas

Director of the Irenaeus Project

Many years ago, in Dublin, I met a man called Michael. Michael had thirteen children and lived totally by faith. He was a charming, gentle man who trusted in God for everything, even his daily bread. His work was to do what the Lord placed before him. The amount of work he did was incredible. Michael could be found speaking all over Ireland and Europe as he encouraged people to trust only in the things of God and not in the things around them. He worked with young people in schools and led retreats. He could be found with alcoholics and the prostitutes in Dublin's red-light area. His very lifestyle challenged those who thought

faith was about respectability and church going. He was not a comfortable man to be with because despite his gentleness and his charm, he had a core of steel running through him. He was never frightened of challenging anything inside the Church or outside it. Many people thought Michael was crazy living as he did but I knew that I had met a prophetic man.

Eugene Kennedy in his book 'The Joy of Being Human' writes of John the Baptist, 'John stands as prophets do to this very day, as an unyielding presence, unsettling us and leaving us not quite sure of how we feel about him. He seems hard to know, hard to like even though we stand back in admiration of him, we react the same way to most absolute figures.'

Mark introduces John the Baptist quoting the prophet Isaiah whom we heard in the first reading when he said, "Look I am going to send my messenger before you, he will prepare your way. A voice cries in the wilderness, prepare a way for the Lord, make his path straight." So, John the Baptist appears, and this is very important in Mark's story of Jesus. John puts us in touch with the Jewish roots of our faith. He's the last of the Old Testament prophets. His clothes and actions would remind any good Jew of the prophet Elijah who in Jewish tradition is to return to announce the coming of the Messiah. I guess we would call him a religious fanatic but maybe that's because we want to miss what he's saying. It's amazing how often we can label and judge people so that we can ignore their message. Essentially, the Baptist's message is about change and if we are going to be honest, none of us really want to change.

John the Baptist is telling us to turn around and undo everything. We're told in the story that John's baptism was for repentance and the forgiveness of sins. The Greek word that captures this is metanoia and basically what it means is, be willing to let God turn your life upside down. Look at the way you live and take radical steps to change so that you can understand what God is doing and be a sign of the presence of God. It's so hard to do that in our middleclass western version of Christianity because often it's calling us to a change in lifestyle. It's calling us to look beyond ourselves and focus on the needs of others and that can bring us into conflict with the ways of the world. So, we don't go there because we don't really want to rock the boat or be seen to be different.

I think the truth is that most of us don't like prophets. We don't like people who turn our world upside down. The Baptist calls us to let go of our own petty understandings and change. That's the word of God for us, 'Change'. Fall into grace and let God change you. So, the word that every gospel begins with is a call to change; a call to metanoia, to deep radical change in the very nature of who we are, where we begin to know at an experiential level that Jesus is the Son of God. That in turn affects the way in which we live our lives and our willingness to stand for the values of justice, truth and solidarity. As we continue our Advent journey let's pray for the courage to be open to metanoia and the message of John the Baptist.