

Advent 3, 13/12/2015, Holy Trinity, Terrigal

Luke 3:7-18

In my earlier days, I considered the season of Advent as a penitential season of the Church's year: not as strict as Lent, but nevertheless a penitential season with some fasting and acts of penance.

It was to "casts away the works of darkness and put on the armour of light."

Now with the readings for this Sunday's Eucharist, Advent seems to be more a time of joy and not primarily to celebrate the anniversary of the birth of Jesus with the accompanying shopping and Santa, the music, the parties and the credit cards, but because God is already in our midst.

The prophet Zephaniah speaks to a people burdened with war and destruction and displacement.

They are a people whose lives have been assaulted and their hopes dashed.

In the face of all this the prophet directs them in a "Song of Joy" to "sing aloud" "shout" and "rejoice and exult with all your heart".

How could they possibly respond in this way?

Zephaniah assures them that with God in their midst, they can move forward into a new life.

In God's Presence they had nothing to fear.

They would be renewed in God's love.

Can this really happen?

It was up to Israel to decide whether they would turn to God and trust the promises God had made to them or to continue on the path they had set for themselves in which they performed the works of darkness.

Unfortunately, our world is not much different from theirs.

We are burdened with war, terrorism and displacement, lives have been assaulted and hopes have been dashed.

We are probably as sceptical about peace and restoration as were the people of Zephaniah's time but scepticism need not prevent us from trusting that God will encircle us with love and grant the peace that we so desperately need.

The second reading from Paul to the Philippians exhorts the people to “Rejoice in the Lord always, again I say, ‘rejoice’. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near.”

This is not a contradiction to what I said earlier.

Paul with his words “The Lord is near” shows an expectation for the final manifestation in glory of Jesus, the Second Coming.

With these thoughts in mind we come to John the Baptizer in this morning’s reading.

In the same way as the crowd asked John “What shall we do?” so we ask it of ourselves.

We may expect to be asked in these last weeks before Christmas to be more spiritually minded, to spend more time in quietness with God, more time in prayer and Bible reading: not that there is anything wrong with any of this. They are part of our spiritual life.

This is not what John asks.

He calls for people to be authentic in the circumstances of their lives.

Those who have more than they need, share with those who have less, be honest, don’t take advantage of those who are vulnerable or of those who are in your charge, or those over whom you have power, be faithful to spouse, family, friends and live in peace.

These are the things that we need in our society to-day.

God is giving us the challenge to show that the world doesn’t have to be like it is.

It can be transformed and it is in and through our efforts, individually and as people, as nations, in government and other controlling bodies that the scourge of terror, war, intolerance and all the other things that make the world as it is so that a new world is fashioned and the reign of God brought forth.

Do we trust God’s promises as we turn to God?

It will take faithful, brave and visionary individuals who proclaim freedom, love, justice, equality and the Kingdom of God to the people that eyes may be opened to truly see the Kingdom of God.

This should keep us busy until he returns again.

God is with you always.