

Sunday Homily

THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

12 DECEMBER 2021

YEAR C

“One who is more powerful than I is coming;
I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals.
He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire.”

Luke 3:16

Illustration

The book *Letters for Aunty Flo: Journal of a Reluctant Disciple*, by Graham Young, is humorous and challenging, daring its readers to let their lives be opened to the possibility of radical changes in their attitudes, values and activities. David, a young man who takes a job in a new town, writes of his experiences in regular letters to his Aunty Flo back home. His new church teaches him about a repentance that is more than the negative act of saying sorry; it is also the positive process of changing our minds, of going against the tide, the normal flow, of going “anti-flow” (which is where his Aunty comes in).

He is challenged about where he chooses to live, the kind of car he thinks he should be driving, how he spends his free time and his salary, the friends he identifies with, his reactions to injustice overseas and on his street, what peacemaking, racism and sexism mean, what he celebrates and prays for – in short, his life is turned upside down, the premises of his Christian faith radically exposed and his discipleship of Christ challenged. Personal repentance becomes radically life-changing for David and for the society around him. In short, David learns that to live out the salvation of God is to live life as an anti-flow person, a radical disciple.

Gospel Teaching

The salvation of God may not look like the salvation that the world tells us is our right, where external cleansing ceremonies are considered enough and sufficient to welcome home the Messiah. John the Baptist characteristically says it as it is – the Saviour is nigh, the crowds are not ready for him, and the need for repentance is urgent. For those unprepared, the coming kingdom will seem like wrathful judgement.

John sternly warns the people of the need for their unreal and sinful lives to be remade and restored. What is demanded is an internal repentance, a revolution of the inner nature, and, though he could point them to the urgency of their situation, and make it felt in his anger and in his baptism by water, John also knew that he was not the one who could bring deep change. He was not the one who was

able to reach down to the inmost secret sin and bring freedom. John's baptism by water, then, is a symbol, an outward ceremony, a preparation for the reception of Christ's life within. It is not sufficient. John prepared his listeners for the coming fire of Christ's baptism with the Holy Spirit, a powerful fire to be unquenchably warming, searching and regenerating to those who are ready and open.

Application

To preach the Gospel of salvation is so much more than telling people of their sins, whether to wrap them up in guilt or to comfort them with the conformity of their lives to socially acceptable norms. We are encouraged into a one-sided view of the coming Lord Jesus in all the social events of Advent – the manger services with children dressed up as sparkling angels, cuddly sheep, caring shepherds, and cute Marys and Josephs; the cosiness of scenes of mulled wine, log fires and warm mince pies; the sentimental indulgence of present giving, especially to children. A complete picture of Advent must include the call to discipleship, the radical challenge of the prophets to the salvation of God, the turning we need in order to be restored, renewed and remade in the love and forgiveness of God, and so to turn our world upside down in his otherness, and with his saving power.

This year, let's not jump ahead too quickly to Christmas and the baby in the manger, but hear and respond to the challenge of the prophets in Advent. The voice of the world in Advent tells us extravagantly to multiply what we and our loved ones have; the voice of the Lord in John the Baptist tells us to divide what we all have and share with those who have not. The voice of the world encourages us into over-indulgence and over-satisfaction of our hunger; the voice of the Lord tells us to satisfy our neighbours' hunger. Why not consider some radical ways in which you and your family can give and share with the poor, whether in your neighbourhood or overseas, this Advent?