

## Homily 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday in Advent – Year A 4<sup>th</sup> December 2016

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Advent is one of the Church's two great times of preparation the other being Lent. Advent plunges us into the mystery of the Incarnation. The Incarnation, the moment in history when the Creator and creation merged, when the creator of humanity becomes human, the arrival of the long awaited Messiah. An event that has change humanity forever, an event that humanity is still trying to understand, an event that when it happened was either ignored or totally missed by most of humanity with exception of a handful of people and even these people the Christ's followers seemed to miss the significance of the event.

I asked myself, why? Probably the only piece of wisdom I have acquired over my 65 odd years is to worry when I say to myself "I understand". I have found that true understanding is not driven by my expectations, my ego, but grows slowly from humbly asking the simple questions. The centre of the Jewish faith at the time of Christ was the Temple in Jerusalem. Yet John announces the coming Messiah not in the Temple but in the wilderness of Judea. When the

leaders of the Temple arrive, the Pharisees and Sadducees, John calls them to account referring to them as a “brood of vipers”. The Pharisees and Sadducees were part of the Temple elite who used their position of power to extort the worshipers at the Temple. The principle means of extortion was the sale of offerings, mainly doves to the poor who had no livestock to offer, and the conversion of normal Roman money into Temple money for the payment of the Temple tax. The Temple elite strictly controlled what offerings, both animals and money, were considered to ritually clean. The hypocrisy of the system is illustrated by the use of Temple money, Roman and Greek money was considered unclean because it had images on it but the temple money which principally came from the mint in Tyre bore the likeness of the Phoenician god Baal but that money was deemed clean.

It is easy for me to see the Pharisees and Sadducees as the corrupt elite who exploited the poor and were ultimately the instigators of Jesus’s crucifixion. But then I remember, St Paul the apostle to the Gentiles, the apostle to me, was a Pharisee. St Paul, a Pharisee who had actually persecuted the early Christians.

I visualise myself walking up to John at the Jordan. How would John call me to account; as a friend or as a member of a Church who for so long ignored the cries of abused children, as a member of a nation who has turned its back on the most vulnerable members of creation under the pretext of saving them from drowning, as a member of a society who celebrates the coming of the Messiah in an orgy of consumerism. John would yell at me. But, that's okay I need to be yelled at. I need someone to say to me it's not enough to be a Catholic, it's not enough to be a Deacon. You are called to act, not to be. You are called to make yourself ready to greet the Messiah.

After John 'unloads' on the Pharisees and Sadducees he calls them to repentance. When I hear the word repentance I think of 'repent' which means to express sincere regret or remorse about one's wrongdoing or sin. But that is not what John means by repentance; John spoke Aramaic like Jesus, however the translation we have of Matthew's gospel comes from the Greek. The Greek word used in Matthew's gospel is 'metanoia' which means a change of heart, a spiritual conversion, an abnouncement of our old ways.

I like good science fiction movies, one of my favourite movies is “Interstellar”. Interstellar is set sometime in future where crop blight on Earth is destroying crops and altering the Earth’s atmosphere threatening humanity's survival. In the movie the hero “Cooper” played by Matthew McConaughey, explains to the heroine “Amelia”, Anne Hathaway, that the only way to save their spaceship from falling into a black hole is to shed weight. Cooper paraphrases Newton's Third Law saying: “The only way humans have figured out how to move forward is to leave something behind”

Likewise this Advent John calls me to metanoia to move forward by the abandonment of my old ways. Like the characters in Interstellar if I want to move forward I have to leave something behind. If I want to stop my life from falling into a black hole of self-righteous complacency I have to leave my ego my false self behind. My ego that whispers; what use is prayer? We need action. As they say I have to let go and trust God. I have to trust in the light of the coming Messiah. You see despite what my ego tells me I cannot change much on my own, but with Christ I can change everything. For me the actions of the Holy Spirit in the world are obvious; Take for example the statement by

Francis Sullivan, lay CEO of the Church's of the Truth, Justice and Healing Council. At the Royal Commission last Friday he gave evidence to the Commission about the Church's intention to establish a lay led new company called Catholic Professional Standards Limited that will establish professional standards. It will have those standards promulgated. Every church leader and authority will have to sign off that those standards will be implemented in their area of jurisdiction, and then that company will audit the leaders, the bishops and others, for their compliance. Then those results will be publicly reported. Even five years ago the thought that such a body would be run by lay people would be unthinkable. But, our Bishops strengthened by the Holy Spirit, are leading our Church to metanoia. Our Church has been called to account and through our prayers it is undergoing a change of heart, a spiritual conversion, an abandonment of our old ways. I realise that this is only a first step but it gives me great hope that through prayer I can achieve what I consider impossible. You will recall that I said earlier that true understanding is not driven by my expectations, my ego, but grows slowly from humbly asking the simple questions. Try this quick quiz: Why

do we exchange gifts at Christmas? The answer may be the key calling our society to account.

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