

Homily 17th Dec Advent III Who, me, a prophet?!

"The spirit of the Lord has been given to me, for the Lord has anointed me."

I was reflecting on the titles of churches when they're dedicated to Christ. You get Christ the Saviour, Christ the King, and so on. But I've never seen a church, I don't think you have either, dedicated to Christ the Prophet. And I suspect it' because people think it's almost like demoting him, and yet Christ was the fulfilment of all the prophets, and this was his great role in his earthly ministry. The spirit of the Lord had been given to him and anointed him in this message. And if we just stick with that theme of anointing, of setting apart for a moment, then if we emphasise that side it also brings something out about in ourselves, especially in this season of Advent, the season of Christ coming into the world. You see, on one end, you've got the great prophet, Isaiah. In fact, some people would say he was regarded as the greatest prophet of the Old Testament prophets. And he was preaching at a time when people had been exiled and were being called back from the Babylonian captivity in the 6th Century.

And then in the middle, you get John the Baptist, who bridges the old and the new. And, of course, he comes in that great tradition of the prophets, when the people were oppressed by the Roman Empire. Prophets seem to spring up when there is terrible injustice. And you can think of modern day prophets, like Nelson Mandela. And then at the other end of the spectrum, you've got the Church, which is meant to be a prophetic sign in the world. The Church calls people, not just to God, but to right living in the best sense, not empty moralism, but to respect and care for others. Because we here are baptised members of the Church, we ARE the church and we are meant to be the prophetic side. The spirit of the Lord has been given to us as an embryo, as it were, and we are anointed and set apart for the good of all, and our eternal salvation. In baptism we're anointed with the oil of baptism, and in confirmation, of course, with the oil of chrism. And we're meant to witness to that anointing, that 'setting apart' that good news. Isaiah came with good news for his people, that of liberation from exile. John the Baptist came with good news about liberation even in time of oppression. And the Church is meant to proclaim good news constantly, even in times of deep distress. We are meant to be signs of hope and connection with and for other people.

We witness to this hope in a variety of ways - perhaps just something simple, like the food bank that people have supported. We can write this off and often say, "It's a small drop in the ocean." - but no matter - people need those drops - and more! I don't know whether any of you have seen one of my favourite films - I've seen it about five times, Schindler's List. It's a very moving film. And when the film ends the liberated Jewish slave workers give him a ring, on which they have etched a quote from the Talmud - the writings of the Jewish Fathers. And it's a quote saying, "He who saves one life, saves the world entire." Think about that, that's powerful. That if you just reach out to touch one life, and save them from desperation and despair, you're actually, by connection, through communion of humanity, saving the whole world. We can't save the whole world, but we can save one person - to save just one person is the link in saving the whole world. And so, this season of Advent reminds us that if Christ is to come to people, if they are to recognize him, then it must be through prophecies - the prophecies and witness of our own lives.

Saint Paul sums it up, doesn't he? - "Never try to suppress the spirit, or treat the gift of prophecy with contempt," because that prophesy, that transforming prophetic sign, is the most powerful sign known to humankind And Jesus calls US now, to give that sign to the world.