

Pastoral Letter of Bishop Alan Williams, sm For the First Sunday of Advent

[Please read and/or make available at all Masses on the weekend of 28th/29th November 2015]

As we begin Advent today's Gospel strikes a note of urgency- "Stay awake, praying at all times", whilst our opening prayer asks for the "Resolve to meet your Christ".

During our Advent journey we will look to the examples of John the Baptist who prepared his people for the coming of the Saviour and Mary the Mother of Jesus who received God's Word in complete freedom and love.

Each day in the Divine Office- the official daily Prayer of the Church- we make the prayers of the Baptist and Mary our own: John's mission was to make "known to his people their salvation through forgiveness of all their sins" and it is Mary who "Rejoices in God my Saviour".

John preached to all kinds of people including soldiers and tax collectors who were familiar with the reality and tragedy of human sin but he also witnessed to the loving-kindness of our God which gives light to those in darkness.

In her prayer The Magnificat, Mary talks repeatedly of the mercy of God- "His mercy is from age to age on those who fear him".

During this Advent a Year of Mercy will be inaugurated by the Holy Father on the Feast of the Immaculate Conception- "This liturgical feast day recalls God's action from the very beginning of the history of mankind... When faced with the gravity of sin, God responds with the fullness of mercy. Mercy will always be greater than any sin and no one can place limits on the love of God who is ever ready to forgive", (Pope Francis, *Misericordiae Vultus*, n3).

In any Holy Year pilgrimage always has a special place. It was Pope John Paul II who summed up the whole of life and human history as a "Pilgrimage to the House of God the Father". This year Pope Francis is asking us all to become pilgrims, to walk through a Holy Door- the Door of Mercy- whether in Rome or Brentwood Cathedral, that we might "experience the love of God who consoles, pardons and instils hope".

This Advent may we all resolve to meet our Christ anew; in the words of the Venerable Catherine McAuley, foundress of the Sisters of Mercy, "May God preserve you and bless you and grant you all the graces and precious gifts reserved for this holy time".

With all good wishes and continued prayers,

+Alan, sm