

Taking Our Hearts to the Lord

Scripture Sharing Group Resource, Advent 2013, Week 1

Reader 1: A Reading from the Holy Gospel according to Matthew (Mt 24:37-44)

Stay awake so that you may be ready.

Jesus said to his disciples: 'As it was in Noah's day, so will it be when the Son of Man comes. For in those days before the Flood people were eating, drinking, taking wives, taking husbands, right up to the day Noah went into the ark, and they suspected nothing till the Flood came and swept all away. It will be like this when the Son of Man comes. Then of two men in the fields one is taken, one left; of two women at the millstone grinding, one is taken, one left.

'So stay awake, because you do not know the day when your master is coming. You may be quite sure of this that if the householder had known at what time of night the burglar would come, he would have stayed awake and would not have allowed anyone to break through the wall of his house. Therefore, you too must stand ready because the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.

The Gospel of the Lord.

Silence

Leader: Let us read the Gospel passage aloud together.

Everyone: A Reading from the Holy Gospel

Silence

Leader: Let us listen to a short reflection on this Gospel passage.

Reader 2: Reflection on the Gospel

We might think that stress is a recent invention. The disciples and those who listened to Jesus had concerns in life too. Like us, they sought to balance the pressures of life with the things of God. No doubt they also had adages, as we have, to guide them: "People don't change" or "The world is an anxious/dangerous place!" Jesus explains to them that we all search among life's pleasures for deeper meaning. He recalls the people of Noah's time. They went on with their lives, oblivious to the impending flood. He tells us that is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man.

It is appropriate, as we are constantly reminded of the number of shopping days left. We begin the Season of Advent. Our time of waiting must hone our alertness. We are preparing for a life-changing event. Jesus wants us to be ready when it happens. We do not have room for distractions, however engrossed the world around us is. When the Son of Man comes, shall we be ready?

Jesus appeals for us to "Stay awake!" and to "Be prepared!" His message is for us, right now.

Silence

Leader: I invite you to share any thought or consideration prompted by the Gospel passage and /or the reflection.

Sharing

Leader: Let us return to our Advent Prayer.

Group returns to page 20 of Advent booklet

Taking Our Hearts to the Lord

Scripture Sharing Group Resource, Advent 2013, Week 2.

Reader 1: A Reading from the Holy Gospel according to Matthew (Mt 3:1-12)
Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is close at hand.

In due course John the Baptist appeared; he preached in the wilderness of Judaea and this was his message: 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is close at hand.' This was the man the prophet Isaiah spoke of when he said:

A voice cries in the wilderness:
Prepare a way for the Lord,
make his paths straight.

This man John wore a garment made of camel-hair with a leather belt round his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. Then Jerusalem and all Judaea and the whole Jordan district made their way to him, and as they were baptised by him in the river Jordan they confessed their sins. But when he saw a number of Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism he said to them, 'Brood of vipers, who warned you to fly from the retribution that is coming? But if you are repentant, produce the appropriate fruit, and do not presume to tell yourselves, "We have Abraham for our father," because, I tell you, God can raise children for Abraham from these stones. Even now the axe is laid to the roots of the trees, so that any tree which fails to produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown on the fire. I baptise you in water for repentance, but the one who follows me is more powerful than I am, and I am not fit to carry his sandals; he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing-fan is in his hand; he will clear his threshing-floor and gather his wheat into the barn; but the chaff he will burn in a fire that will never go out.' The Gospel of the Lord.

Silence

Leader: Let us read the Gospel passage aloud together.

Everyone: A Reading from the Holy Gospel

Silence

Leader: Let us listen to a short reflection on this Gospel passage.

Reader 2: Reflection on the Gospel

What an unlikely person to go and listen to! Rough, unkept, living in the wilderness. Who would pay any heed to this man? Who would make the journey to go and hear him? How did news spread all throughout Judea about him?

His message wasn't a comforting message. John's message was challenging. Do we like being challenged?

Don't we like to think that what we are doing is just fine? Why should we listen to this Preacher?

But that was not the reaction of the people of Judea. No. They came flocking to hear him. "Repent for the kingdom of God is close at hand" John tells them. They instinctively feel that something truly amazing is about to occur. They feel a sense of guilt and shame and want to make a new beginning – a new beginning of fidelity to God awoken by strange Prophet.

With great humility John asserts his own inadequacy. He is but a messenger. A messenger with courage and conviction, proclaiming a message which evoked a response of wonder, curiosity, conversion and from some perhaps anger. John's message is challenging to us all, it is stark and uncompromising. The truth always is; and it leaves me questioning myself and the adequacy of my response to God's love. How is it for you?

Silence

Leader: I invite you to share any thought or consideration prompted by the Gospel passage and /or the reflection.

Sharing

Leader: Let us return to our Advent Prayer.

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Taking Our Hearts to the Lord

Scripture Sharing Group Resource, Advent 2013, Week 3.

Reader 1: A Reading from the Holy Gospel according to Matthew (Mt. 11:2-11)
Are you the one who is to come, or have we got to wait for someone else?

John in his prison had heard what Christ was doing and he sent his disciples to ask him, 'Are you the one who is to come, or have we got to wait for someone else?' Jesus answered, 'Go back and tell John what you hear and see; the blind see again, and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised to life and the Good News is proclaimed to the poor; and happy is the man who does not lose faith in me.'

As the messengers were leaving, Jesus began to talk to the people about John: 'What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed swaying in the breeze? No? Then what did you go out to see? A man wearing fine clothes? Oh no, those who wear fine clothes are to be found in palaces. Then what did you go out for? To see a prophet: he is the one of whom scripture says: Look, I am going to send my messenger before you; he will prepare your way before you. I tell you solemnly, of all the children born of women, a greater than John the Baptist has never been seen; yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he is.'

The Gospel of the Lord.

Silence

Leader : Let us read the Gospel passage aloud together.

Everyone : A Reading from the Holy Gospel

Silence

Leader: Let us listen to a short reflection on this Gospel passage.

Reader 2: Reflection on the Gospel

Have you ever had the experience of wide open spaces and later being confined in a restrictive space? John the Baptist experienced that change from wilderness to prison in today's gospel, which begins "John in his prison". John was a wilderness man. The wilderness is outside human control, a place of getting in touch with what is essential in life, a place of God's mysterious presence. In that setting John's preaching and questions have a fiery tone. But prisons are made by humans and John's question, "Are you the one who is to come, or have we got to wait for someone else?" spoken from this restrictive space, suggests a more muted and enquiring approach, focussed on Jesus himself, "Are you the one who is to come, or have we got to wait for someone else?" Jesus answers by describing his ministry of healing and restoration. "Sight, mobility, cleanliness, hearing life and dignity are returned to people who did not have them" (John Shea). Maybe Jesus' words "Blessed is anyone who takes no offence at me" offers John a blessing for not taking "offence" at how the kingdom of heaven is breaking into the world, but not on John's terms, but on Jesus' terms. Can we claim the same blessing?

Silence

Leader: I invite you to share any thought or consideration prompted by the Gospel passage and /or the reflection.

Sharing

Leader: Let us return to our Advent Prayer.

Group returns to page 35 of Advent booklet.

Taking Our Hearts to the Lord

Scripture Sharing Group Resource, Advent 2013, Week 4

Reader 1: A reading from the Holy Gospel according to Matthew (Mt 1:18-24)

Jesus is born of Mary who was betrothed to Joseph, son of David.

This is how Jesus Christ came to be born. His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph; but before they came to live together she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit. Her husband Joseph, being a man of honour and wanting to spare her publicity, decided to divorce her informally. He had made up his mind to do this when the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, and said 'Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because she has conceived what is in her by the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son and you must name him Jesus, because he is the one who is to save his people from their sins.' Now all this took place to fulfil the words spoken by the Lord through the prophet:

The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son
and they will call him Emmanuel,

a name which means 'God-is-with-us'. When Joseph woke up he did what the angel of the Lord had told him to do: he took his wife to his home.

The Gospel of the Lord.

Silence

Leader: Let us read the Gospel passage aloud together.

Everyone: A Reading from the Holy Gospel

Silence

Leader: Let us listen to a short reflection on this Gospel passage.

Reader 2: Reflection on the Gospel

Have you ever thought about St. Joseph's inner journey in the lead up to the very first Christmas? Ponder for a moment the soul-searching faced by an unassuming Jewish carpenter on hearing his betrothed was "with child" in a culture that did not tolerate births outside marriage. Imagine the thoughts and emotions he wrestled with as he weighed up what to do.

The fact the Angel told him not to be afraid also suggests he was fearful, and possibly for Mary and her unborn child more than for himself. What too must he have thought on hearing "because she has conceived what is in her by the Holy Spirit ... the one who is to save his people from their sins". Joseph, "a man of honour", did as God bid but even with that I am sure he had worries. His yes of faith and trust in God's providence, while opening his heart to loving and being loved by Mary and Jesus, did not immunise him from future hardship. If anything it necessitated an ever greater attentiveness and obedience to the word of God and a holding dear to God's promise of salvation through Jesus when God seemed silent.

Lord, for the grace to imitate St. Joseph in faith, fidelity and friendship. Amen.

Silence

Leader: I invite you to share any thought or consideration prompted by the Gospel passage and /or the reflection.

Sharing

Leader: Let us return to our Advent Prayer.

Group returns to page 44 of Advent booklet.

Dioceses of

Achonry, Ardagh & Clonmacnois, Armagh, Clonfert, Elphin, Kerry,
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