

Advent 2 Year B 2017 ii

One message rings out loud and clear from the readings at today's Mass. We hear it in the 1st reading, and it sounds again in the Gospel: *"Prepare a way for the Lord....make his path straight"*.

A straight road shortens the journey for the traveller – and while bulldozers may straighten the winding road, level many a mountain, and fill in many a valley, that's not what the prophet is talking about when he says: *"Make a straight path for the Lord"*.

However, for religious fundamentalists, or the current American President, wishing to ingratiate himself to hard right Christian Evangelicals - or shore up the Zionist vote - only a bulldozer or a bomb will do - as we have seen these past few days with Donald Trump - unilaterally declaring Jerusalem the capital of Israel against universal protocols of how we deal with invaded occupied territory, international law and resolutions of the United Nations going back decades. Trump has decided that might, illegal occupation, and the subjugation, humiliation and desolation of the entire Christian and Muslim Palestinian people who hope only for the return of their own homeland - is right!

You may wonder why hard right Christian fundamentalists are so keen to support Trump in this adventure of madness. It is not because they support the Jewish people or their faith - it is because one of their core beliefs is that in supporting Israel's ambition to forever occupy Palestine they will encourage Armageddon - the final war of destruction that will bring on the end of the world - and the second coming of the Messiah.

Lord Patton, the British conservative diplomat, politician and Catholic - called Trump's decision on Jerusalem *"diplomatic arson"* - he has wilfully thrown a match into a powder keg - and we will now watch the ensuing violence and death - while Potusⁱ Pilate sits by and washes his hands in feigned innocence.

"Prepare a way for the Lord....make his path straight".

The path to be made straight is not by bulldozers, bombs, or diplomatic arson - it is by the integrity of our own way of life. And it's not so much a straight path as a straight attitude.

We can be living next door to each other, even sitting next to each other, yet, because of a hostile, judgemental, intolerant or unforgiving attitude we may be unable to travel the few metres or even millimetres that separate us, one from another.

Here the word 'straight' stands for honesty and right living, wisdom and understanding, being peaceful, merciful and just in all things.

People are often urged to straighten themselves out, or to go straight after committing a criminal or dishonest act.

Crooked, on the other hand, stands for dishonesty, cheating, deceit: a crooked way of living – crooked attitudes, injustice, intolerance, corrupt and maniacal power.

We find the straight path by acting with integrity, treating people fairly, acting with justice and compassion, not making life more difficult for anyone, sharing with those in need. This is the straight path to God.

The prophet Micah puts it even more simply:

“This is what God asks of you: That you act justly, love tenderly, and walk humbly with your God.

Advent, as we prepare for the birth of the Christ child, is a time for looking at what might be crooked in our own lives – and straightening them out.

And praying that those in positions of power and leadership may also straighten themselves out.

Our Palestinian Christian brothers and sisters throughout Jerusalem and the Palestinian West Bank will, this Sunday, hear the same words at Mass that we have just heard in today’s 1st Reading:

“Console my people, console them.”

Having lived with some of them in Palestine for a short time I know they feel betrayed by Christians in the West. These Christians have lived the faith for 2,000 years in Palestine and they cannot understand why Western Christian countries have been at the heart of their dispossession, occupation and betrayal. Pray for their consolation and for a just peace.

In the words of a very Anglican hymn - adapted from Psalm 122:

Pray that Jerusalem may have
Peace and felicity:
Let them that love thee and thy peace
Have still prosperity.

Therefore I wish that peace may still
Within thy walls remain,
And ever may thy palaces
Prosperity retain.

Now, for my friends' and brethren's sake,
Peace be in thee, I'll say;
And for the house of God our Lord
I'll seek thy good away.ⁱⁱ

Amen.

ⁱ [POTUS] President of the United States

ⁱⁱ New English Hymnal 441