

Sunday Homily

2ND SUNDAY OF ADVENT

5 DECEMBER 2021

YEAR C

DIVINE OFFICE WEEK II

"You will reach the perfect goodness
which Jesus Christ produces in us."

Illustration

At the time of the London Blitz during the Second World War, in 1940, Coral Atkins, like thousands of other children, was evacuated to the countryside for her own safety. The people she stayed with were strict and cruel towards her, and this disrupted childhood experience haunted her adult years. She grew up to become a British theatre and television actress, and it was while making a celebrity appearance for charity one day that she saw Jessica, a little girl with a haunted face, living in a children's home.

This event triggered a deep impulse in Coral that she should do more than just make appearances at charity events. She decided to dedicate her life to lost children. She opened her own children's home. Disruptive, disturbed children, she said, are just children who need a lot of love, because they have had disruptive, disturbed experiences.

One day, one of Coral's helpers, a qualified assistant very much given to discipline, expressed her despair at Coral's simple method of love and patience. "I must protest," she said, "or else something terrible will happen." Coral was exasperated. "You just don't get it, do you?" she replied. "Something terrible has already happened to these children."

Coral's simple method was a profound understanding of these children's pain and needs. She instinctively knew what was going on inside their hearts, and she gave them unfailing love and attention and her utmost honest endeavour. By her integrity she gave them peace. By her devotedness she gave them honour. She helped them to recovery and to the restoration of their lives.

Gospel Teaching

This is the experience of the prophet Baruch in our first reading today. Something terrible has happened. The Jewish people are forced from their homes into exile, but Baruch can see a day of liberation in the future, when something wonderful will happen. Jerusalem will be restored, and the glory of God will shine for all to see.

This future day is given definition for us in the Gospel when Luke says exactly when it was that John the Baptist began his preaching along the Jordan valley. "In the fifteenth year of Tiberius Caesar's reign" is when John came; and John's

coming was a definite sign that something was about to happen, something wonderful. Someone was coming. The day that the prophet had longed for is the day of Jesus Christ.

This good news was preached most powerfully by the apostle Paul. It was an amazing conversion that Saul of Tarsus – so fierce, forceful and even violent in protecting his rigid version of religion – should now spend his life preaching the love of Jesus Christ. He tells his people in Philippi that he loves them “as Christ Jesus loves you”, and he prays that their love for each other “may increase more and more”.

This is not a pious platitude that Paul is speaking. He has come to realise that the love of God in a person does powerful things. It improves our knowledge and our understanding. It deepens our perception so that we can always recognise what is best in life. More, it makes us pure. It brings us to the condition of being like Jesus himself; and that is the glory of God, present in our world.

Application

When this happens to us, something wonderful has happened; and, no matter how terrible some of our experiences may be, no matter what has happened to us in this life, this love, this persevering love, is stronger and deeper and greater. It restores to life, where once there was only death.

Coral Atkins had one little girl in her care who never spoke, but who crawled into a pram, and hugged her dolly for love. Coral never forced this child to be better. She just loved her and cared for her and protected her. Then one day, during a noisy party, the little girl spoke and brought the room to a shocked silence. “I don’t like turkey,” she whispered. A stunned and surprised Coral pretended not to hear properly. Eventually the little girl roared, “Can nobody in this room hear me? I don’t like turkey.”

“Oh yes, we can hear you,” Coral answered with a beam of happiness on her face. “Oh yes, we can hear you very well.”