

“The Dead Are Raised to Life”

Last week we left John the Baptist crying in the wilderness to prepare a way for the Lord. Today we find him languishing in prison for having called out the illicit incestuous love affair of King Herod who has him thrown into jail for his boldness.

Perhaps here John has time to reflect on all that has happened and how his work to prepare for the coming of the Christ has been frustrated. Does this mean he got it wrong? Does this mean that Jesus is not the one who is to come? Otherwise why would God stop him in his God-given task of heralding the coming of the Lord? So he sends his followers to check Jesus out: “Are you the one who is to come, or have we got to wait for someone else?” Jesus doesn’t answer their direct question with a direct answer. He simply says to them, just go and tell John what you see happening: “the blind see again, 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.”

John would instantly have identified these words from today’s first reading as coming from the prophet Isaiah as a description of what would happen when the Christ came on earth and he would know that Jesus is indeed the one, true, long-awaited Messiah. Isaiah also speaks of the closeness of the Lord bringing new life to all that is dead and weary and spent in creation: the wastelands rejoice and bloom, the desert brings forth flowers like the jonquil, the weary are strengthened, ‘the eye of the blind shall be opened, the ears of the deaf unsealed...the lame shall leap like a deer and the tongues of the dumb shall sing for joy’. The people will come ‘shouting for joy, everlasting joy on their faces; joy and gladness will go with them and sorrow and lament be ended’.

When Jesus enters your life and you accept and welcome him, he brings you to life in new ways. Your whole outlook changes, your values are transformed, you feel different; your eyes are opened so you see people in a new light; your ears are unsealed so you hear God speaking through the events of daily life; where you were lame before and struggled to get along in life, somehow, when Jesus enters your life, you get a new energy and

sense of purpose, you walk taller and stand straighter and speak with a new authority and wisdom, you become kinder, more thoughtful, more relaxed, more accepting, more able to cope, more able to smile, to empathise, to offer help, to be yourself as God made you to be. Jesus is the resurrection and the life, open your heart to welcome him and be raised to new life in him. That's the promise of Advent and the realisation of Nativity. "Though Christ be born a thousand times anew, despair, O man, unless he's born in you".