

## Fr Dispin John – Homily 1<sup>st</sup> Sun Advent 29/11/2020 St John's Mitcham

Waiting is part of life and there is no life without it. All of us waited to be born, waited to be nourished, waited, to be loved. We learn soon enough that the fullness of life is not available to us like instant coffee. There is always more to life and to people than we can manage. Manage to think, manage to absorb and manage to even imagine. So we have to wait. Advent is that time of waiting, when we are reminded that we have to wait for God,

We cannot fully understand God. We cannot possess or process God. We cannot see God. We can only wait for God to let him be seen or known. And when we wait for that, God, we confess our own incompleteness. And we acknowledge that we need God. Our waiting is an acknowledgement that we need God.

The first reading that Daniel read for us, we get a glimpse of the difficult waiting from the people of Israel. Now the setting is, the people of Israel had been exiled, taken away as slaves to Babylon. The kingdom was defeated and so most of the people were taken to Babylon to be slaves in 587 BC. And they stay there, but they don't give up the hope of returning home. So while they are there, they live in the hope of coming back. They remember that song: "By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down and cried. Oh how can we sing the song of the Lord in a foreign land." Now that is a part of the story of an exiled people. A people who struggled with their own faith because they couldn't see a future, but they still hung on to the hope that one day, that future will be ready. In 539 BC the people returned. After nearly 50 years they return. When they return, they come to Jerusalem, but Jerusalem was in such ruins, they couldn't believe what they saw. They were devastated. Because they came home thinking, they lived in the hope of returning to a glorious Jerusalem, but they come home to witness a total disaster. Their temple, not there, their people not there and their culture and their identity was completely destroyed. So totally devastated. It is within this context that the prophet Isaiah now gives hope to the people.

And so today's first reading, again, if you have time, I'm sure you will, go through all the readings of this Sunday. Powerful readings that evoke very powerful sentiments. Oh Lord, you yourself are our father and you, our Redeemer is your ancient name. Meaning, you have been our protector. You have been our saviour. You have been our provider, But you're absent now. We can't see any sign of you. Lord, why do you leave us to stray from your ways and harden our hearts against fearing you. People taking the blame upon themselves for the disaster they are facing. They are saying, unlike Adam, who said, it's you God, this time the people have learned their lessons and they are saying, it's us. We made a choice to walk away from you. And therefore we are in this situation.

The story of the people of Israel is an important story for us because they look back at the goodness of God and their own sinfulness. They realize that their sinfulness is not a good response to the goodness and the generosity of the Lord. So what did they say? We repent. We want you to be our God, again, we want you to love us again. We want you to be our friend and Redeemer, again.

And at the end of the reading today, we have a powerful image. They are saying, Lord, you are the potter, and we are the clay. The image of a potter, getting his hands dirty to shape and to reshape. It's a beautiful image, because here, God is seen as somebody who is happy to get dirty, his hands dirty and messy. Our life is messy. Can be dirty at times, But God, the potter, is ready. He's ready to deal with our dirt and our messiness, to shape and reshape our lives, to make us a beautiful pot in his beautiful hand. The story of Advent is our story. A story to tell us that God is now ready to shape us and reshape us to be the beautiful people that God has intended when he made us, that God has created us to be. Now, if God is ready to get dirty with his hands and messy, to be the potter, the question is in this time of Advent, are you ready to be his clay? Are you ready to supple yourself to make yourself available, to make yourself repentant, so that God can shape and reshape us to be the people that he has called us to be? Advent is a happy time of waiting, when God is going to shape and reshape us into the beautiful people that he has created us to be.

Happy Advent.