

Who is the Christ Child! Advent 3 – 12th December 2010

Readings:

Matthew 11: 2-11 & Psalm 146

Hand up if you've got one of these little beauties! (Master card)

Well I think it's great. You hand it to the shopkeeper and you walk out with a brand new digital camera, iPod, a DVD or a computer or anything you want. It's great.

No wonder one of these cards has this little advertising slogan -
"You've got the whole world in your hands - Mastercard"

But sadly come January - reality will bite - and it'll be the bill that is our hands, not the whole world. And sadly we continue to delude ourselves that our quality of life has everything to do with one of these, or the myriad other ways of making money. We spend on credit and hope for the best.

But if our quality of life is dependent upon a new sound system, or a new computer or a new iPod - how sad is that!

So it was with some satisfaction that I read yesterday's "Summer Age"'s cover story entitled "Give it up!". "Consumerism gives way for compassion" ran the sub-headline, as the writers detailed ways of celebrating the Christmas season through giving and volunteering. What a wonderful challenge to the great God consumerism!

Ironically in the developed world where we live with wall to wall affluence, we also live in a time of pervasive cynicism and widespread depression and no amount of shopping till you drop will satisfy the hunger that is rife in our world today. And more and more, people are realizing that, even the press!

Whole communities are getting in on the act with the *ABC Christmas Giving Tree Appeal* and *The Examiner's Empty Stocking Appeals*. I like to think the wider community has been infected by the Christ message that it is better to give than receive.

And I have to say that Pilgrim, in its own unique way is also contributing, with dozens of people this last week giving their time to the Christmas Bowl collection on Wednesday and Friday, and the Basket Brigade yesterday. And I know many of you make donations at this time of year direct to overseas aid organizations.

All this is wonderful, but more important than any of this is the hope that Christmas would be a time for putting ourselves in the hands of the Christ child and not Mastercard or any other sort of card.

Which brings me nicely to the gospel reading. On the face of it, our reading has very little

to do with the Christmas story. But it goes to the heart of our annual celebration of the coming of the Christ Child.

Who is this person called Jesus, that we should make such a fuss of his birth? So I'm going to ask you this morning, who is Jesus to you?
Why are you here worshipping God through Jesus the Christ?.....

This question is asked a number times in the Gospel, and here we have John the Baptist essentially asking the same question of his cousin. In prison for his abrasive tongue, John hears of Jesus and what he's doing and it doesn't sound like the Christ he's been expecting. His preaching has been all about repentance and God's judgement of those who won't mend their ways. John's messianic expectation is that Jesus will come and wipe out God's opponents. It was a common belief in the Messianic age in which John lived. It's a view of the Christ popular even today with some Christians who can hardly wait for the judgement, punishment and vindication to come. But Jesus disappoints and confuses John. Jesus' reply implies that "if you want to know who I am, look at what I do". It's more important to grasp the meaning of the works of Jesus than any claim to Messianic titles. Jesus' works are imaginative examples of restoration. Something that is missing was found; something that was wounded was healed. Sight, mobility, cleanliness, hearing, life and dignity are returned to people who did not have them. In the mythology of his time, Jesus is restoring creation, undoing the effects of Adam's fall. He is reconnecting people with God. This activity may not be what John is expecting. It does not have the edge of judgement that John's preaching pushed – Jesus' way is to be a way of restoration, of love that goes beyond any need for retribution.

But it is a way predicted in our other readings set down for day. In Psalm 146 we hear clearly of who Jesus is and what he is to bring to birth in the world.

Here is the One who, in the words of the psalmist, "gives justice for those who are oppressed, and food to those who hunger, who sets the prisoners free; opens the eyes of the blind; who lifts up those who are bowed down. The one who loves the righteous; watches over the strangers; and sustains the orphan and the widow, but frustrates the way of the wicked." This is the Christ we are called to follow. These are the fruits that followers of Christ need show. And as we approach this Christmas let us sing a new song, a song of justice, a Christmas carol of love in our living.

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