

Advent 2 (2015)

The gospel I have just read was written by Luke, who also was the author of the earliest history of the church "The Acts of the Apostles" 'here we see the budding historian. He wants to be very precise about his dates, so he mentions the emperor, the governor, the high priests and the rulers of two nearby regions. Why be so precise? Luke recognized a momentous event in the history of the Jewish people---John the Baptist receiving the word from God and going out to proclaim it to all people. That word was: all flesh shall see the salvation of God. All shall see the salvation of God, -all,- the grace of God will be available to all, not just to the Jewish people, Christ would come to save all. For many years I was a member of a religious order called Redemptorists, its motto is: *Copiosa apud eum Redemptio*- With him is copious redemption, plentiful, overflowing copious redemption, an ever flowing stream.. This has always inspired me. I am constantly in awe at the extent, the unlimited extent of Gods mercy and grace. On Tues., the feast of the Immaculate Conception, the church throughout the world begins the Year of Mercy. At this time of year we are preparing to celebrate that, to celebrate the coming of our God into a troubled world with copious redemption, boundless mercy, in the person of Jesus Christ.

John cried out be ready, sacred scripture is constantly telling us to be ready, not to put things off. Within the next few weeks it is a safe bet to say that someone will ask you if you are ready for Christmas. What they mean is, have you decorated your tree, have you done your shopping, have you written your cards. I don't think that is exactly what John the Baptist had in mind. What did he have in mind? A radical change in our life style, as radical as filling valleys, levelling mountains, smoothing the roads. We all have our individual filling, levelling, smoothing to do but it strikes me that on a world wide scale the greatest need is to be truly ready for the one we call Prince of Peace. I believe that we can agree that the lack of peace in our world may be the biggest challenge we face at this moment in history, the greatest obstacle to the copious redemption that Jesus wants to pour out on all of humanity.

Wherever we look there is violence. It is not only in Syria and Iraq and Nigeria and Paris but right here in our own backyard. For this year to date there have been more than 80 homicides in Oakland and in the past few years nationally there

have been an average of 14,000 homicides annually, about 10,000 of them by firearms. There have been 351 mass shootings this year alone, 352 since last Wed., (defined by FBI as shootings in which at least 4 people have been killed). How many of them by so-called Muslim radicals. Two. Just two. It seems we Christians are perfectly capable of slaughtering each other. That is horrific. Where is the outrage? What is being done about it? Nothing, only a lot of empty talk, what Shakespeare described as "sound and fury, signifying nothing." John the Baptist was pointing to the future coming of the Messiah. We believe that he has come in the person of Jesus, so we must look to the present and take responsibility. Promoting peace has never been easy and certainly very difficult, complex at this moment. As Xtians we are torn apart. There are good people who maintain that the only way to deal with terrorists is to bomb them indiscriminately and there are good people who say that would be lowering ourselves to the level of the terrorists. There are many of us conflicted in conscience. Politicians have invented a wonderful new word 'collateral damage' to hide the reality that our bombs and drones are killing innocent people along with the guilty. I am not a total pacifist. I was brought up in a military family in Ireland, my father fought in the Irish war of independence and was a career army officer in the Irish army and I have a grand-nephew who is in the US air force. He is a weapons officer, so may have to press the button that drops the bombs so I am conflicted but do recognize that we have at times to confront evil with force, but the terrorists win if they fill our hearts and minds with hatred and prejudice and generalizations about people of a different religion or race. They win if they cause us to discard our ethical standards. As Christians we are called upon to be peacemakers not just peacekeepers, maybe we could begin on a small scale to help that copious flow of grace to spread. One stone dropped in a pond makes ripples but not very many but if a truck load of stones is dropped in that same pond the ripples may extend to the far shore. Can each one of us drop one pebble of peace? As Christians I believe that as a minimum we have to ask ourselves these questions: Are we at peace with ourselves, with whom we are in relation to God, with whom we are in relation to family, friends, neighbors, co-workers. Are we peacemakers, promoting justice and opportunity for a better life for all. It is difficult to believe that all flesh shall see the salvation of God, to believe that with him is copious redemption. During this Advent season let us spend quality

time in reflection on the great mystery of God's love and acceptance and in prayer that all of humanity, including ourselves, be filled with the Spirit of Love, the Spirit of Forgiveness, the spirit of Mercy, the Spirit of Peace. In that way we will be ready.