

Sermon

◆ **First Reading:** *Isaiah 40: 1-5, 9-11*

◆ **Second Reading:** *2 Peter 3:8-14*

◆ **Gospel:** *Mark 1:1-8*

All of Holy Scripture(the Bible) is about getting to know God, getting to know his nature, his approachability, his presence and availability ; Holy Scripture deals with how God communicates with his master piece, us human beings ; “What is God like?” is a question we all ask sooner or later. When I was growing up God was always looking “down” at us, observing to see if we were doing something wrong ; we were told He had a little-black-notebook handy, and that He kept a strict account of our many sins. We were ignorant of Holy Scripture, it was never promoted in the classrooms, our religious instructions were boring, our “religious” teachers were uninspiring, it was drummed into us to “JUST OBEY and you won’t go to Hell” ; that’s only a brief description of the way we were taught religion at school and at home in Dublin during the late 60’s and on into the 70’s, my growing up years!! Consequently the great tragedy that came from this was that many abandoned their religion on leaving school, and even more so after emigrating to live in other countries outside Ireland ; IF ONLY they(...our teachers, local clergy, our parents, or someone-in-authority) had said to us, JUST ONCE with truthful conviction “GOD REALLY LOVES YOU WITH AN INDESCRIBABLE LOVE, HE’S ALWAYS WAITING TO HEAR FROM YOU BECAUSE HE LOVES YOU SO MUCH, AND HE’S NOT FAR FROM YOU” ; when I left school at 16 I went off and discovered for myself that God is real and yes, it’s true, He is not far from any of us ; But first it’s up to each of us to invite God Holy Spirit into our lives, He doesn’t impose Himself on anyone ; In the 1st reading this Sunday, the prophet Isaiah presents a wonderful image of God, as a shepherd who cares for his flock, a shepherd not just standing there on the periphery ready to deter predators, but rather remaining close to the sheep, not only protecting them, but loving them as though they were his own flesh and blood, so what is God like?, (from Isaiah) **HE IS LIKE A SHEPHERD FEEDING HIS FLOCK, GATHERING LAMBS IN HIS ARMS, HOLDING THEM AGAINST HIS BREST AND LEADING TO THEIR REST THE MOTHER EWES**

..... no mention there of a “little-black-notebook”!, quite the contrary, the Lord our God is as approachable as a hard working kindly shepherd ; God is concerned for all of us ; there is a line in one of our hymns **WE ARE THE SHEEP OF HIS GREEN PASTURE...** You’ll also notice something very uplifting within the first verse of to-day’s psalm **I WILL HEAR WHAT THE LORD GOD HAS TO SAY, A VOICE THAT SPEAKS OF PEACE. HIS HELP IS NEAR FOR THOSE WHO FEAR HIM ...** “FEAR” in this context must be understood properly, no! not that sort of fear!!! You know what I mean “fear of the teacher, fear of the next utility bill, fear of the landlord or of that insufferable boss... ; For those who “fear the Lord” may be interpreted as a “fear of losing Him”, as in, “I’m afraid of losing God’s friendship” ; not to worry! Once you and I do our best in pleasing and loving the Lord, then we have nothing to fear, and NO! He’s never out to punish us when we go astray on the unpredictable road of life when our sinful inclinations get the better of us ; again use the image of the SHEPHERD, if one of the flock goes astray, the shepherd goes in search of the one “out there” somewhere, once found he rejoices and brings back the lost one to the sheepfold ;

Have you a problem with your perception of God? “oh! He will never forgive me for what I did 20/30/40 years ago!” Then why not read to-day’s 1st reading from Isaiah? read it slowly, absorb it, and go deeper into a good life-giving perception of the God and Father of us all...

Sadly too many among the baptized flock, at some earlier stage of their lives, gave up on their knowledge of the nature of God, their misconceptions of a loving-Shepherd-God remained static and never went any further “..I gave up on religion years ago, couldn’t be bothered anymore...”, “too many rules”!, and so what are we left with in such a scenario? spiritual tragedies galore!! along with spiritual bankruptcy ; on this 2nd Sunday of Advent, why don’t you and I examine our understanding of the nature of God? If we are not growing spiritually, if we are not going deeper in our union with the Holy Spirit, if our Faith seems static or dimly “on n’ off” like weakened batteries, then this needs to be addressed thru’ prayer, reflection and while we’re at it to consider going to Confession between now and the Christmas event....

Meantime we still have to deal with this Pandemic and all its disastrous consequences for so many workers, families, victims etc..

With the economy diminishing and “fed-upness” all over the place, perhaps you and I could consider, not only donating non-perishable foodstuffs to a local charity, but also to plan for ourselves a simple Christmas, it doesn't have to be like previous years SPEND! SPEND! SPEND! As a gesture of solidarity with the world's poor and the local poor, surely we can tone down all of that “extra” stuff ; In the new year a surge of unemployment is predicted, and consequently the threat of hunger looms ; on that level, let us spare a prayer and a thought for low income families and for low paid zero contract workers along with many more who now have to live with a cloud of uncertainty hanging over them ; and don't forget to say HELLO to the person you regularly see walking alone.....

God bless stay healthy...

Fr Kieran A. Fitzharris SVD