



## ADVENT 2 (C)

If you have had the chance to go to the Holy Land, you may well have spent some time on Mount Carmel, the place where Elijah faced down and defeated the prophets of Baal. You can read the story in the 18<sup>th</sup> chapter of the first book of the Kings. Today you can look down into the valley where the events that the writer describes took place. Nearby is a statue of Elijah: he stands on a plinth, a sword held high in his right hand, his foot on the neck of one of the prophets of Baal. It is not a comfortable statue. He is no twinkly eyed uncle or doting father. His face is implacable, strong and determined. You are not meant to feel comfortable in his presence: after all, the real Elijah denounced Kings and struck terror into wrongdoers. That is, after all, what he is there to do: to proclaim God's message whatever the circumstances.

But that is not an easy task. Implacable Elijah may have been, courageous he certainly was. But even so, he had moments of despair and brokenness. After the showdown with the prophets he incurs the vindictive wrath of wicked Queen Jezebel. Jezebel is one of those people whose character leaps out of the pages and not in a nice way. Elijah flees from her and ends up in a cave and prays for deliverance. And it is here that he encounters God. Not in the earthquake. Not in the mighty wind. But in what has been variously translated as a still small voice, a gentle breeze; and, in one translation, a 'fine silence' It is this translation that attracts me: it is in silence that we encounter God. Only when we are still and silent can God begin to make his voice heard.

In today's Gospel, John the Baptist makes his first appearance. Like Elijah before him, he comes to call us to repentance, to conversion of life, to turn away from sin, and turn back to God. He is preparing the way and calling us to prepare ourselves. Like Elijah before him, John the Baptist is no stranger to the wilderness. On a diet of locusts and wild honey, clad in the prophetic garb of old, John was, without doubt, a man acquainted with the hot solitude and hot silence of the desert. In this inhospitable terrain, like others before him, John encountered God and heard his call, embracing a way of life and a vocation to prepare others for the coming of the Messiah.

Everyone of us needs silence, if we are to make progress in the spiritual life. Everyone needs a wilderness, a cave, a place of solitude and silence. Elijah did. John the Baptist did. Our Lord himself did. If we are to heed and obey the Baptist's words, 'Prepare the way', then we need the silence to do it. This is what Advent is for. It is our time of silence to enable us to retreat for a little from the noise and the rush of Christmas preparations. We know what that is like: shopping, cooking, decorating, writing cards, putting up decorations, buying presents. Where's the silence and stillness in that? Well, we can't avoid it entirely, I know. But what we can do, what we should do, no, what we **MUST** do, is stop for a little. Make space, create a chance for that silence. Tottenham is sadly lacking in deserts. Caves are in short supply. But space is possible; silence is possible.

Please use this short time, only about three weeks or so, to make the space needed to be with God in silence. Use the silence to prepare the way. Look at your life and your relationship with God in Christ. Where are we on the journey of faith. What part of my life needs to be

touched God's healing, by God's love, by God's mercy and forgiveness? Take time to read the scriptures. Examine your conscience and prepare for a confession before Christmas. How can Christ come and take up residence in our lives if we haven't cleared out and confessed our sinful thoughts, words and deeds? Renew your commitment to Christ and his Church. We need to do all these things. But these take silence and reflection, stillness and space. Advent is that space, given to us by the Church. Let us use it wisely and profitably.

Then, God willing, we will be inching just a little further down that road of discipleship. Urged on by John the Baptist, we walk in penitence and trust down the road that leads to the Kingdom. May we do so with faith renewed, love rekindled, hope restored, with grateful hearts and lively minds, towards Christ, the light of the world.