

ST ALIPIUS ADVENT REFLECTION

For several years now the St Alipius Ballarat East Bereavement Team has come together in Advent and Lent to reflect and prepare for the feasts of Christmas and Easter. At first it was only the team; then some members of the Parish Community joined us. This year we placed a notice on the Parish Notice Sheet and sent away for the Advent booklet, 'Beloved', and waited. The fifteen booklets with daily readings arrived and were all used.

We meet each week on a Thursday morning and below is an example of the program we follow, this one focussing on the Third Sunday of Advent, often called Gaudate Sunday.



We lit the rose coloured candle – the liturgical sign to rejoice Christ's coming is near. We began with the song, 'Where two or three are gathered in my name'.

We focused on the scripture for the week: The first reading was Zephaniah 3: 14-18. The setting for this was in about 600BC. The Israelites, God's people, had turned away from God and had been taken into captivity, where they experienced great hardship. To help our understanding we looked at a map from this time and then read the reading from Zephaniah. Zephaniah is prophesying that God has been with his people and knows their anguish and is going to bring them back to their own land. 'Rejoice and exalt with all your heart'.

We then moved into quiet reflection, followed by a period of sharing. In this sharing we reflected on the turnings away from God in ourselves and in our world. The inhuman aggression and misuse of power that ruins lives. This continues today in the same countries of the Middle East, in Australia, in homes and schools where even children learn to be aggressive towards one another and older people. An example is the anger/aggression that can be behind graffiti. We ask the question, 'What can we do?' We need to listen, to pray, to act where we can. How?

Next we turned to Paul writing to the Philippians 4: 4-7 for the second reading. Here he tells us to 'Let your gentleness be known to everyone, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving'. Again we moved into quiet reflection, followed by sharing. Here we asked questions such as: How often do we ask God to give us what we want, but are slow to wait for God to answer – perhaps in a very different way from our asking? Do we allow 'the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, to be in our hearts and minds'? How often do we turn away and come back? Do we show to everyone our hope in the Spirit of Christ given to us in Baptism? Do we seek for other voices before we hear the voice of God? We turn to John, the prophet of the coming of Jesus.

The Reading of the Gospel was Luke 3: 10 – 18 and the setting was John baptizing in the River Jordan not far from Jerusalem – a map points this out for us. The crowds gather to be baptized with water and to listen to what John has to say. We focused on quiet reflection and with the sharing we concentrated on the following which included the crowds gathered around John – they asked, 'What must we do? John responds:



To the Crowd: Share what clothing / food that you have.

The Tax Collectors: Take only what is prescribed

The Soldiers: Do not take money by threats – be satisfied with your wages.

The crowd were filled with expectation for John to be the Messiah and John proclaimed that the Messiah was coming to baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire. They have known the leadership of God for his people, Israel and now, Christ is named as the One sent to God's people to baptize them with the Holy Spirit and fire. What must we do? We who have been baptized in Christ?

Our response to this particular week's reflection was to show people the spirit of St Alipius Community – the spirit of hope, forgiveness, mercy, prayer and waiting - especially in this time of the Inquiry - and know that God is with us as we look forward to Jesus' coming at Christmas. We listen afresh, and know again God's forgiveness and mercy for us and for our world, we look to ourselves to be gentle, forgiving, hopeful people.

We end our time together with the song, 'Peace be with you my friends'

Why do we come to the reflection group meetings? We look forward to the meeting each week to give us some time out and help us know what Christmas is all about. It is good to come and listen to what is shared from the readings. We can each read the scripture on our own, but being with the group gives different versions of thinking. We are comfortable with the group and it is easier to share and welcome others. We can learn about the settings behind the readings and we can see and understand how they fit into our lives. The maps are important because they pinpoint the background. We can see the names of the countries of the region then and link them with the countries of today.

Our meeting reflections help us to listen better and understand the readings for the following Sunday, and we look forward to hearing what Fr Adrian opens to us – and we are ready for it.

All of this helps us to take the Gospel into our lives in our daily living.

St Alipius Ballarat East Advent Group

