

Reflection on the Gospel — 2nd Sunday of Advent Year A (Matthew 3:1-12)

-Veronica Lawson RSM

Desertification of earth is becoming the norm in these troubled times of ours and wilderness or desert features powerfully in today's gospel reading. The desert is the biblical place of encounter with God, the place of beginnings and of testing. The voice of John the Baptizer is heard in the Judean desert. His food and clothing are desert-derived. John is identified as the one of whom Isaiah spoke, the voice crying out in the wilderness, "Prepare the way..." Ecologically, the Isaian image is confronting: preparing the way involves major earthworks that reconfigure the landscape, levelling the mountains and filling the valleys to create straight paths. Yet the way is never straight and the metaphor must not be literalised. John knows this. The preparation he calls for is ongoing *metanoia* or reevaluating: keep on turning your lives around, keep on expanding your horizons, for the kin-dom of the heavens is "close at hand". The kin-dom is both present and yet still approaching: the verb used here, *ἄγγικεν*, allows for this ambiguity.

The first reading from Isaiah (11:1-10) provides content to the notion of kin-dom or *basileia*: John is announcing the advent of God's long awaited empire of justice and right relationship. He offers a baptism of repentance (*metanoia*). In other words, John's baptism presupposes a commitment to a renewed way of life. His ministry is hugely effective. It attracts "people of Jerusalem, all Judea and the region along the Jordan River." The arrival of two groups of religious authorities prompts a fierce response: "you brood of vipers". John has no patience with those who use their privileged positions to seek their own advantage. He challenges them with the striking image of the "more powerful one who will baptise with the Holy Spirit and fire" and will sort out those who refuse to turn their lives around (the chaff) from those who listen to the call for *metanoia* (the wheat). The latter are "gathered in" while the former are burned "in a fire that never goes out".

Fire is a multi-faceted image in the biblical record. Here it is used metaphorically for the judgment on the wicked. Fire, as we well know in this dry land, is a challenging symbol: it is both friend and foe. In the first-century *Manual of Discipline* from the Qumran community by the Dead Sea, water, refining by fire, and "a holy Spirit" are listed together as the instruments of God's saving and purifying action. John, who may have been a member of the Qumran community, presents his own role as preparatory to that of Jesus, the Spirit-filled, powerful and enduring agent of God's refining and purifying work in the world. We recognise our own ongoing need for a "baptism" with the Holy Spirit and fire. We prepare the way by constantly expanding our vision and turning our lives around in the direction of God's reign of compassionate care.

ST ALIPIUS PARISH — BALLARAT EAST & BUNINYONG SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT — YEAR A, SUNDAY 8TH DECEMBER, 2019

*Our parish is committed to the safety, wellbeing and dignity
of all children and vulnerable adults.*

St Alipius' Parish Church
82 Victoria Street, BALLARAT EAST 3350

SS Peter & Paul's Church
701 Fiskens St, BUNINYONG

Contact Details

Parish Office: 84 Victoria Street, Ballarat East 3350

Hours: 9.30am - 1.30pm Tues, Thurs, Fri **SAP Liturgy email:** sapliturgy@gmail.com

Telephone: 5332 6611 **SAP Liturgy website:** www.sapliturgy.net.au

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Clergy and Staff

Priests: Frs Justin Driscoll, Jorge De Chavez OSJ, Vincent Pham Van Long CSsR

Visiting Priests: Frs Dan Arundell and Barry Ryan

Parish Coordinator: Lucy O'Beirne

Child Safety Officer: Roxanne Leed

Finance Officer: Kerrie McTigue

Funeral Ministry: Kathy Curran & Carmel Flynn

Masses This Week

Wednesday, 11th December	2.00 pm	Anointing Mass, St. Alipius' Church
Thursday, 12th December	11.00 am	Mercy Place (Corbett St)
	5.00 pm	SFX Primary School Graduation Mass
Friday, 13th December	9.30 am	St. Alipius' Church

Next Weekend's Masses

St Alipius' Church , Ballarat East	Saturday	14th December	6.00 pm
	Sunday	15th December	9.00 am
SS Peter & Paul's Church , Buninyong	Sunday	15th December	10.30 am

Third Sunday of Advent — Year A

Readings	First:	Isaiah	35:1-6, 10
	Second:	James	5:7-10
	Gospel:	Matthew	11:2-11

Baptisms: Marley Gull, Maggie Lewis, Aleeya Mason

Recent Deaths: Pat Blood, Eila Punch, Dorothy Vaughan

Anniversaries: Dorothy Mitchell, Edith Mitchell, Terry Towns

We pray for Kateri Byrne (Albury), Cathy Jones and Peter Martin and all who are unwell

What's on for Advent that can help us prepare for Christmas?

• St Alipius' Advent Anointing Mass & afternoon tea

Wednesday 11th December at 2.00pm. Afternoon tea will follow in the St Alipius' Hall. A plate to help with the afternoon tea would be appreciated. Those needing transport please contact a member of the Caring Group or Lucy in the parish office.

• **Lead Kindly Light** Advent Reflection opportunities. Week 3 - Thursday December 12th, 10.30 am at Ss Peter Paul Buninyong & in the evening, 7.00 pm at St Alipius'. All welcome to join Fr Jorge who will lead this week.

• **Advent Retreat** Sunday December 15th, St Alipius' Hall, 2pm - 5pm Loreto Sisters Natalie Houlihan and Rachel McLoughlin will lead the retreat which will be a spacious Advent time of reflections, readings, music, images, silence and ending with Spiritual Conversation circles to conclude. All are welcome.

• **Nazareth House Carols** Sunday Dec. 8th in the Chapel from 6.00pm, Nazareth House Hall. All children are invited to play a part in the Nativity scene. Parishioners welcome.

• **Anglican Cathedral** Service of Lessons & Carols Sunday December 22nd 7.00 pm

Giving Tree Gift Tags

Now available near the Giving Trees in each church. Please return gifts by Sunday Mass on 22nd December. Any late offerings will need to be personally delivered by parishioners. Thank you for your anticipated support.

St Vincent de Paul Society Christmas Appeal

Please help us to "Help A Family Celebrate Christmas", this year. Envelopes are available at the Piety Stall. All donations are used in the Ballarat area, donations of over \$2. tax deductible.

"Making a Scene at Christmas"

Nativity displays will be held at Ss Peter & Paul's Church, Buninyong, December 12th -15th. Open Thursday & Friday 9.30am - 3.00pm, and Saturday & Sunday 9.00 am - 5.00pm. Parishioners are invited to help set up on Wednesday 11th December from 9.00am.

Christmas Masses

Christmas Eve: 6.00pm & 8.00pm at Ballarat East, 7.00pm at Buninyong
Christmas Day 9.00am Ballarat East

Counting Teams

This Week: **Team 7:** B. McKeegan ©, M. Ridsdale, K. McKeegan

Next Week: **Team 8:** J. Patton ©, B. Brisbane, J. O'Brien

Parish: Envelopes: \$ 729.90
Loose: \$ 300.00
Direct Debits: \$ 975.00
\$ 2004.90

*Thank you to those who
contributed to the
collections last weekend*

Presbytery: \$ 904.00

Thankyou!

To all who assisted with the working bee to clean St Alipius' Church last Saturday evening after Mass, especially Kevin & Diane McKeegan for coordinating this event. We also thank St Alipius' Parish School for their BBQ and drink containers. It was a great evening of friendly collaboration and we enjoyed the opportunity to relax together and enjoy some food and drink.

Personal Thanks: "To all the parishioners who have offered prayers and support to me during my illness. I am grateful and very pleased to say that I am now in remission. God bless and many thanks." Terry Foran

Stewardship Renewal - Parish Groups, Ministries and Organisations

This week we look at the responses received for interest in Community/Social for our parish:

- 1 Assist with Organising Functions
- 1 Friendship Club
- 5 Friendship Group for Over 50s
- 1 Fundraising Events
- 10 Parish Family Groups (Passionist)
- 3 Piety Stall
- 3 Walking Group

OLHC Parish Wendouree Christmas Day Lunch

OLHC Parish Wendouree are hosting lunch on Christmas Day in the Parish Hall, 482 Gillies Street, Wendouree from 12.00noon – 2.00pm. Transport is available. For bookings or further information phone 0419 975914 or email christmaslunchwendouree@gmail.com.

Plenary Council 2020 — Discernment Gatherings

Thank you to all those who joined in last week's discernment gatherings. Our next parish discernment gatherings will be held in the St Alipius' Hall on Monday 17th February 7pm - 9pm, and Tuesday 18th February 1pm - 3pm. Many thanks to John Clonan, Damien McCartin, Kristen Murray and Bernadette Tolan who are our Parish facilitators.

Report from the Parish Finance Committee (meeting held Tuesday 3rd December)

Parish Members: Brett Holloway (outgoing chair), Kathy Curran, Arnoud Goossens, Tanya Hislop, Paul Jans, Gerard McCarty, John White, with ex-officio: Fr Justin & Kerrie McTigue.

Current Agenda items include: Hall Hire Conditions & Agreement (updated), decision to rent the Parish House (Cnr Victoria & King Sts), kitchen upgrade at St Alipius Hall, final works on Buninyong Hall, asbestos report and remedy as required, consideration of a defibrillator, repair works required on Presbytery roof, McKenzie Reserve upkeep, Master Planning the Parish Site in Ballarat East (including House at 2 King Street South (Cnr Hopetoun St), Fincham Organ (to be tuned by Organs of the Goldfields), Parish Child Safety, Finance Reports and Budget for 2019/2020, awareness of the decline in Planned Giving this year and the sustainability of this moving forward. Meeting dates were set for 2020.

Time was also spent on the future Parish Leadership structure, and the formation of the Parish Pastoral Council to lead the Parish in to the future. Discernment of how this will be structured to guide and support existing ministries and how it will relate to the groups together with forming other groups as needed for specific purposes. It's an exciting time to be involved in St Alipius' Parish, so don't be afraid to put your hand up to become involved!