

## *1 Advent (B)*

The story is told of Leonardo da Vinci that when he was painting his renowned *Last Supper* he fell out with a friend. After the row he went to his studio, picked up his brush, and prepared to paint the face of Jesus. But to his dismay he couldn't make a single decent stroke.

The fault was not in his hand, which was as skilful as ever, but – he realised – it was in his heart where there was 'ill-feeling'. Because he was disturbed within he was clumsy in action: he lacked his usual sensitivity. The squabble he had had with his friend meant he wasn't fully at peace in himself. Out of touch with Jesus in his heart he couldn't portray him on canvas.

What was he to do? Leonardo realised that he had to put things right first: to make up – to forgive, apologize - whatever was needed to restore good relations. And he left the studio to do just that. When he returned he found he was now able to complete the painting as he had first envisaged it in his mind and heart.

Right relations with each other, and knowing the love of Jesus, go very much together. We need both. If we want to know the living Jesus, to be in touch with him in our heart, then it is essential that we put things right with one another.

And if we want to keep good friendships going, and deepen them the more, then we need to be in touch with the living Jesus, to open up to him in our heart of hearts as best we can.

In the season of Advent we hear that God promises to come to our aid. And in this season especially we should ask for God's assistance – for ourselves, and for the whole human family.

In the time of Advent a good way to prepare ourselves to know the coming of Jesus deeply in our heart and lives is to think, speak, and act kindly towards each other.

A distressing phenomenon of our times is the number of refugees leaving their homes and homeland to reach places of safety and security in other countries. Such large scale migration has not been known since the aftermath of the Second World War.

Of course, it is a complex issue: there are various causes for the refugee crisis, and there are understandable concerns amongst the people of those nations whose hospitality is being sought for their *own welfare* - which may seem to be at risk.

This is not the place - nor is there time - to elaborate on these matters\*. But we are certainly called by the Gospel of Christ to offer what care we can to those who are in distress, seeing in them the person of Jesus himself. *In so far as you did this to the least of these brothers of mine you did it to me.* The Lord teaches us that our response to, or our neglect of, the needs of our fellow human beings is the measure by which we will ultimately be judged.

We should certainly pray for all those refugee families who have been uprooted and who desperately seek somewhere safe to settle.

And we need to recognise that often the cause of their having to leave their native lands is dire poverty that is not of their own making, or the experience of unending violent conflict, or of political oppression.

Refugees also flee from natural disasters, some of which have certainly been brought about - or exacerbated - by greedy and irresponsible exploitation of natural resources without due regard to their sustainability. We are failing in our stewardship of the earth, our planetary home, and our brothers and sisters suffer as a consequence.

As part of our effort to become a **Live Simply Parish** we are currently giving particular consideration to the plight of refugees and to how we might offer some appropriate relief of their sufferings.

One way is to provide warm clothing to those who have arrived on our shores in these cold winter months. To this end a large cardboard box, brightly decorated and labelled *Refugee's*, has been placed in the church porch to receive any such garments for adults and teenagers that you might like to donate. The contents will be delivered regularly to the St Vincent de Paul Society's Support Centre on York Road.

The Support Centre offers support to Refugees in many other practical ways, such as helping them with the process of acquiring legitimate residency in this country, or in finding suitable accommodation and employment. Any offers of part time or occasional assistance at the Centre in these matters by those with appropriate expertise will be much appreciated.

Today in his Gospel the Lord bids us to **wake up!**

**To wake up** to our responsibilities - for our own personal welfare, and that of our fellow human beings - indeed, to the wellbeing of our planetary home.

\* Recommended reading: *The New Odyssey - the Story of Europe's Refugee Crisis*, Patrick Kingsley (Guardian Books 2016, £9). 'A wake up call' - Jon Snow (TV presenter).