

## *2 Advent (B) – Bridging the gap*

We are all well aware of how breakdowns can occur in human relationships, even between those who love and respect each other.

When this occurs both parties suffer from the tension and the frustrations of the separation.

Although there can be a desire on both sides to overcome the barriers which have arisen sometimes neither person has the will to make the approach necessary for a reconciliation to come about.

There can be such a breakdown between parent and child, between loving spouses, between long-standing friends, between colleagues at work, between fellow parishioners.

What a great relief it is when one person finds it within them to cross the **gap** dividing one from another. Their generous approach can ‘open up’ the way and make it possible for the relationship to be restored once more.

Of course, the other party can still spurn such a move – large-hearted though it is. In which case the sorry situation of estrangement will just continue sadly on.

There are similarities in our relationship with God.

Perhaps we have broken away from God through some deliberate sinful choice, going ahead with something we know full well to be against God’s will and our best interests.

Or it may be through laziness and neglect that our relationship with God has become cold.

For some people it may be that the hurts and injustices of life have brought them to doubt the love of God – things seem to have conspired against them, and bitterness has entered their hearts. Sometimes such persons cry out to God in their anguish – ‘I hate you’ – words surely heard by the most loving of parents from the lips of their children at one time or another.

So there are a number of reasons why people whose relationship with God has been broken off find it difficult to begin again. There are barriers that seem to be insurmountable – shame, guilt, or doubt about the reality of God’s love. There is indeed ‘a great gulf’ between them and God, as the Gospel story puts it, a chasm needing to be filled.

The **Season of Advent** is a time of grace for us, a time for a fresh approach to one another.

In our relationship with God it is God who makes the first move. God comes towards us assuring us once more of Divine love.

One way in which God does this in the words of kindness and forgiveness we hear in the Scriptures and which are echoed in our hymns at this time of year: *Console my people, console them, says your God.* (1 Reading)

God assures us of love most fully by being born as the Babe of Bethlehem. In the person of Jesus God identifies totally with our human plight. God appreciates the hurts life inflicts upon us - in the person of Jesus God shares them.

In making this approach of love God desires that the barrier that has arisen between us both is overcome:

*Let every valley be filled in, every mountain and hill be laid low.* (1 Reading; Gospel)

And in the Advent season God approaches us with the **grace of forgiveness and renewal**, and invites a response from us. We are called to turn back to God: it is our chance for a new beginning:

*Prepare ye a way for the Lord, make his paths straight.* (1 Reading; Gospel)

An outward sign of our having such an inner disposition would be for us to participate in the celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation – and there will be a special opportunity for this soon (Thursday December 18th) when we have our Advent Penitential Service.

As a **practical** demonstration of the sincerity of our reconciliation with God the Church encourages in this holy season also to make up the differences that may have come about between us, between one another. We should give prayerful consideration to the breakdowns that have come about in our daily life and ask God for the grace of restoration and renewal.

We know well enough that sometimes we cannot find such love in our own hearts. All too often we find ourselves tied up by our feelings of hurt, resentment, or self-righteousness. We need to call repeatedly upon the Lord for assistance, perhaps using the words of today's Psalm:

*Let us see, O Lord, your mercy, and give us your saving help.*