

Homily. 2nd Sunday of Advent. Year. A. 7/8 December 2019.

I've been a user of social media and other internet platforms for some time now. Some might even say that I was an 'early adopter' of apps and sites such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and various chat forums. I've also been a subscriber to YouTube for many years, following my various interests such as history, archaeology, horology, music, scripture and so on through videos and podcasts. Over those years I've learnt a great deal, enriching my thinking and life-style. I've been able to interact with people I would otherwise have never met and I've managed to stay in touch with people I've known from years ago.

However, I must tell you what I see and experience right now. Over the last 18 months and more I've noticed a change, and one that's not for the better. I've seen a growth explosion of false, misleading and fake information flooding these platforms, a veritable stampede of quackery, half-truths and outright lies that easily misleads if we're not careful, properly informed and willing to double check what we're seeing and reading. I've also noticed camps forming around set positions that are totally closed to any opinion but the one espoused by that tribe. God forbid if anyone should put forward a position other than the one subscribed to by that group, for what would follow is anger, vulgar abuse, character assassination, blocking and even and exile from the camp of followers, likes, loves, hearts and thumbs up approval.

Much of this is due to the breakdown of the political systems in the West and to the corruption of entire countries, companies and individuals by the

old temptations of money, positions of influence, fame and power. The other side to this is that some groups and people simply get a thrill out of manipulating others for whatever their perverse ends might be.

John the Baptist was no fan of the Pharisees and Sadducees who came to see what he was up to out in the desert wilderness of Judaea. He wouldn't have given them his likes, hearts or his thumbs up. He was fearless in challenging their motives, even calling them a 'brood of vipers', but he didn't leave it at that. John went on to say that if they were sincere, willing to repent and produce the right fruit, then they, too, could be baptised in preparation for the advent of the more powerful One whose way he was preparing. On a similar note St. Paul urged the Christians of Roman church to be tolerant and united in mind and voice despite their differences, always treating each other in the same friendly way that Christ treated them. That Christ-like way is one of courtesy and respect, courage, service and the sacrifice of ones wishes for the well-being of others. In a nutshell, it's the way of selfless love which presents, explains and defends the truth while allowing for free speech and other opinions.

This is what we most need in our exchanges be they on-line or in our parliaments, schools, streets, courts, homes and churches; a civil conversation leading to freedom and light, not tribes and exclusion. This is harmonious vision of God revealed to us in Isaiah's words claiming our hope and demanding our actions the Advent week ahead of us all.