



2nd Week of Advent and Our Lady of Guadalupe 10 and 12 December 2023
Reflection Mgr Daniel McHugh

“Prepare the way for the Lord ”

(Mark 1:3)

One of the most heartening experiences for us Catholics this past weekend was to see on TV reports on COP28 the respect and admiration for the contribution of Pope Francis in relation to major issues facing the world as a result of our destruction of the environment. The Pope’s address to COP28 was read by Cardinal Pietro Parolin, the Secretary of State, due to the Holy Father’s absence with ill health. The Pope said: *“I am with you because now more than ever, the future of us all depends on the present that we now choose. I am with you because the destruction of the environment is an offence against God, a sin that is not only personal but structural, one that greatly endangers all human beings, especially the most vulnerable in our midst and threatens to unleash a conflict between generations I am with you to raise the question which we must answer now: are we working for a culture of life or a culture of death? May we be attentive to the cry of the earth, may we hear the plea of the poor, may we be sensitive to the hopes of the young and the dreams of children! We have a grave responsibility: to ensure that they be not denied their future.”*

In this regard, the Pope has been quoted especially on his plea for elimination of fossil fuels; and the need for change in our lifestyles. As I read the Gospel for the Second Sunday of Advent and the call of St John the Baptist *“to prepare a way for the Lord”* these words of Pope Francis about *“change of lifestyle”* hit home. John the Baptist is presented to us an example during Advent. We too are called to prepare a way for the Lord. *“Like John the Baptist, we are messengers in service to one who is greater than we are”* says one Commentary. Where do we stand personally on these hard hitting words of Pope Francis to the world leaders at COP28: *“The drive to produce and possess has become an obsession, resulting in an inordinate greed that has made the environment the object of unbridled exploitation.”* We are going to have an interesting examination of conscience in preparation for our annual Confession in the Sacrament of Penance for Christmas!

The Holy Father continually challenges us to reflect on our Faith in relation to the big issues of our day. I was reading an article recently where a Theologian writes about *“Culturally contextual Theology”* which is about new guidelines Pope Francis has given Theologians (Ad Theologiam Promovendam). This urges them to note particularly the *“context”* in which they are reflecting and teaching the Faith. We are in a tumultuous world from many perspectives: different cultures, ideologies and faiths and Theologians must bring Church teaching to bear on life in these different contexts. This is what Pope

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Francis is doing himself in relation to the major challenge of destruction of the environment today. To priests in their Pastoral work, he has famously pointed out getting to the “*smell of the sheep*” – not a phrase I particularly like – is vitally important. For me it means knowing people so well that we are alongside them and the issues they face. We bring the Gospel of Jesus, the Tradition of the Church to bear on the lives they truly live, rather than to some idealistic world in which no one lives.

In terms of the local Church, we have a Feast this coming week which illustrates the need for our missionary work – our taking of our Faith practice to different nations – to be in the context of the culture of the people. It is the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe. Nowadays, we are familiar with the image of Mary there, which reflects the customary dress and the looks of the people of Mexico at the time. The missionaries had not been so successful in their taking European imagery to that part of the world. Our Lady came to Gaudalupe as one of them – today the Faith is ‘incarnated’ in the lives of the people there. Mary is loved and venerated, especially as she is depicted as pregnant and at this time the celebration of the Birth of Jesus, the Saviour is near.

I have focused on the destruction of the ‘environment’ and the need to relate our Faith to the issues around this most important phenomenon of our time as we prepare for Confession at Christmas. Given the “context” of our celebrations is so often to do with family and children maybe we could look to positive actions celebrating the wonderful world God has entrusted to us. Because I love God’s creation I want to share that love with my kids: so got out on lots of walks; teach love of nature identifying birds and plants (amazing what you can learn even at my age!); grow plants or a garden – this way you get kids involved; always look for opportunities to go out rather than be indoors all the time; encourage your child to keep a nature journal – there is an old story called “Eyes and No Eyes” about 2 boys who walked through the same landscape but experienced it totally differently, because one was paying attention and the other was not. Turning our attention to the natural world makes us happier and enjoy life more! Furthermore we will be one with Pope Francis in wanting to care for our “*common home*”, the world God has given us. We relate our Faith to our context today and enjoy a healthy, happy Christmas with the child Jesus who came to live with us in our world.

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