

Reflection for Second Sunday of Advent

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Readings: Isaiah 11:1-10; Psalm Psalm 71(72):1-2,7-8,12-13,17 Rom 15:4-9; Lk3: 4, 6; Matt3:1-12

‘A voice cries in the wilderness’; the section of Isaiah that Matthew quotes in this week’s gospel. How often have we ‘heard’ voices in the wilderness as we are exposed each day in the media to the thousands of women, men and children who are moving in a wilderness from the former security of their country, their homes, their family, their identity. John the Baptist’s ‘voice in the wilderness’ on this second Sunday of Advent challenges us to ‘Prepare a way’ - to leave behind our fears, our doubts, our self centeredness and to open our hearts in welcome to the coming of the Lord, who is incarnated in his people. ‘He will save the poor when they cry, and the needy who are helpless’ (Psalm 71).

As a community and as a Province we have responded to the call to ‘be with people on the move – migrants, refugees, trafficked and homeless persons’ and in London we made a commitment to share in the ‘At Home’ scheme of the Jesuit Refugee Service, to ‘welcome the stranger’. We are privileged to host asylum seekers in our communities.

The ‘stranger’ very quickly becomes our friend. Who knows what desperation drove her or him to seek asylum, with the insecurity of moving from place to place every few months, being turned down in their asylum application time after time, with no certainty for the future, no access to public funds or to the dignity of employment, leaving them destitute. It is a privilege to share our home with someone who has nowhere to call home and increases our awareness of the reality of homelessness. It helps us widen our horizons, to see beyond the day to day petty inconveniences and demands of community life. We are enriched by openness to different cultures, different foods and ways of cooking, but most of all to the gift of a person who is precious in God’s eyes.

As we journey through Advent we pray that John’s call to prepare the way, to make the paths straight - may be realised in an openness by our country, our communities, our families - so that Christ may be welcomed anew in the ‘stranger’.

“Often, often, often goes Christ in the stranger’s guise”. (Rune of Hospitality - an ancient Irish poem)