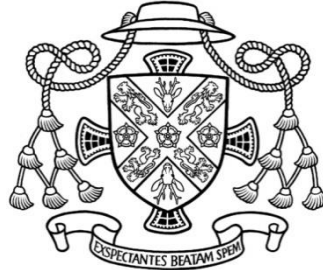


Pastoral Letter Of Terence Patrick Drainey



Bishop of Middlesbrough

2nd Sunday of Advent 2023

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

The vast majority of our churches at this time of the year have an Advent wreath. In fact, I half suspect that at some point towards the beginning of this mass either the second candle was ceremoniously lighted or was already burning when you came into church. Some wreaths have four candles, three purple and one rose-coloured, and some also have a white candle in the middle.

These candles have many layers of meaning. The four candles and the four weeks to complete the lighting certainly represent the long time of waiting between the prophecies of the coming Messiah and the birth of Jesus represented by the white candle. And the other colours? Purple is the sign of patient waiting, like watching for the sun to rise into the darkness of a winter's sky. It's a sign of humble petition for mercy and forgiveness. The rose-coloured candle is a joyful encouragement that the Lord is coming soon.

In some traditions each candle has a different name, in order of their lighting they are Hope, Peace, Joy and Love. Last week we lit the candle of Hope, next Sunday and the Sunday after we light the candles of Joy and Love. But today we light the candle of peace.

*I will hear what the Lord God has to say,
a voice that speaks of peace,
peace for his people.
Mercy and faithfulness have met;
justice and peace have embraced.
Faithfulness shall spring from the earth
and justice look down from heaven.
Justice shall march before him
and peace shall follow his steps.*

This is what we said or sang in our responsorial psalm, and the lighting of the candle of Peace on this Second Sunday of Advent seems to draw our attention to our need of peace. We need peace in our lives. We need peace in our Society. We need peace in our Church. And we desperately need peace in our world. Would you not think that as our world becomes more enlightened and more recognisant of the needs and

rights of others, as we value equality and freedom, the world might be a better and more peaceful place? Yet it seems to be inversely the case.

The problem is that we cannot have peace without justice. Justice is the foundation on which peace is built. Justice as defined by St. Thomas Aquinas (and the Catechism of the Catholic Church) is the virtue that consists of a constant and firm will to give God and neighbour their due. Justice establishes right relations with others.

The Church, because it sees peace as the legacy of Jesus, the 'Prince of Peace', and so the outcome of Divine love and order, has a much broader vision of what peace is than merely the absence of armed conflict. True peace is of God, so it involves the harmony of all people seeking justice for all. In this way peace is a reflection of God's Kingdom. Peace cannot exist where there is injustice, inequality between people and nations (economic or otherwise), thirst for power, pursuit of endless profit as an end in itself, nor when there is an arms race. Ultimately, whenever there is disregard for or breach of the commandment to 'love our neighbour' we cannot rightly be said to have peace; not the peace God intends for us. More recently, Pope Francis has emphatically reminded us again that caring for Creation and cruelly destroying the resources of poorer nations and communities also stands in the way of true peace.

So, throughout this season as we continue to light our Advent candles, let us remember that there is a whole world of meaning in what we are doing. As we pray for the coming of Jesus at Christmas, we are also praying for the establishment of his kingdom of hope, peace, joy and love, in our lives, in our Society, in our Church and in our World.

So let our Advent prayer be:

Above the clamour of our violence your word of truth resounds, O God of majesty and power. Over nations shrouded in despair your justice dawns. Grant your household a discerning spirit and a watchful eye to perceive the hour in which we live. Hasten the advent of that day when the weapons of war shall be banished, our deeds of darkness cast off, and all your scattered children gathered into one. We ask this through Him whose coming is certain, whose days draw near: your Son Our Lord Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, God for ever and ever. Amen.

May Jesus, the Prince of Peace, bring his gift of peace to us and all people this Advent and Christmastide.

Yours in blessed hope,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lawrence Patrick". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Bishop of Middlesbrough

To be read and made available on the Weekend of 09/10 December 2023