

2018 3RD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

I remember my mother telling me of the profound sorrow she felt early in 1941 when she farewelled my Dad as he left to fight in the deserts of Egypt and the mountains of Italy during the 2nd World War.

Then began the long wait- 5 worry-filled years. News would come of bloody battles. All my Mum could do was to pray that her beloved Lew would be spared.

As long year followed long year she almost despaired of ever seeing him again.

And then came VE Day- followed a few weeks later by the trip she had dreamed about for so long- down to Wellington on the train to meet the ship her soldier was returning to her on. Mum's face would glow as she described the ecstasy she felt when she first saw the ship- a tiny speck on the horizon- coming ever-so slowly into the harbour. And then the joy which suffused her whole being when she first saw her special man waving to her from the deck-knowing that he only had eyes for her.

For those five long years Mum had worn her engagement ring and had been faithful to Dad... longing for his return and the day of their marriage. What happiness she experienced that day! Her joy as she leapt into Dad's arms was rapturous.

And this is the spirit of today's Readings. Listen once again to Zephaniah: "Shout with joy, daughter of Zion. Rejoice, exult with all of your heart, daughter of Jerusalem. The Lord your God is approaching- a victorious warrior. He will exult with joy over you. He will renew you with his love. He will dance with shouts of joy because of you."

We the Church are the Bride. Jesus is the Bridegroom. Jesus- the Love of our Lives- is approaching. He is coming at our Christmas Mass. He will soon be with us.

This Sunday in Advent has always been known as 'Gaudete Sunday' because of the theme of rejoicing that pervades it. With three candles aglow on our Advent Cross we are aware of how close we are to Christmas.

We recall the desolation of mankind in the centuries before the Coming of Christ. They were separated from God by a huge ocean of sin. Communication was possible- by letters and poems in the Scriptures. But how inadequate was that!

And then God came to live among mankind! O wonder of wonders! Time does not matter. At our Christmas Mass we enter the Stable of Bethlehem and welcome Christ with rapturous and undivided hearts.

I have every reason to believe that for those five long years my mother would have been absolutely faithful to the man who would become my dad. She would have had no hesitation in rushing into his arms.

Will we be able to do this to Jesus at Christmas time? Has our love for the Lord been totally faithful?

Probably not.

This is what Advent is all about. It is a time to make a fresh start. It is a time when we examine our relationships- especially within our families and within our Parish Communities and if things have become somewhat frayed, we determine to let by-gones be by-gones. We must not allow poisonous relationships fester any longer because they distance us from our Beloved God.

And so we come to the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

There is a marvellous image in today's Gospel of what happens within the Sacrament.

In our sinfulness, we are compared to unclean wheat; wheat all mixed up with chaff, dust and dirt.

In the Sacrament of Reconciliation, Christ comes to us like a winnowing fan- tossing us like unclean wheat high up into the air. God's Breath- the Holy Spirit then comes and blows all the dirt, the chaff and the dust away-leaving us behind as clean wheat.

On Thursday come to the Sacrament of Reconciliation and permit the Holy Spirit to blow away your resentments, your jealousies, your unforgiveness and your vices. So that on Christmas Day you are able to come to Mass with all the excitement of a faithful lover waiting on a sun-drenched wharf for the arrival of her beloved. And when you make your Christmas Communion, fall into the arms of your Beloved, Christ the Lord, and utter those magic words "I love You" from the depths of your heart.