The Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem

Nuns Cross

Diocese of Dublin and Glendalough

Preparing the Way: called to be prophets

Persevering and Persistence

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Isaiah 11.1-10; Psalm 72.1-7, 18-19; Romans 15.4-13; Matthew 3.1-2

In the name of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Spirit

1. Dear Friends, I greet each and every one of you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is a delight to be with you today and we bring greetings from the Diocese of Jerusalem. And I am grateful for this invitation to preach as I travel around your Diocese strengthening our new and exciting partnership.
2. Today we remember the prophets and are reminded of those powerful words of John-the-Baptist, often called the last of the prophets:

**“Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand”**

**(Matt 3.2)**

1. As your dear Archbishop Michael knows, this is a theme that I have been reflecting on at our Diocesan Synod in November. I have asked all my clergy to go to their parishes and to mediate with the people on the life of John the Baptist and what this means to us as Christians in the Holy Land.
2. John’s voice in the wilderness was persistent and it was full of perseverance. We know that he was so persistent, so determined to speak the truth that it eventually cost him his life. Yet while he lost his life, his words and actions are still remembered today.
3. As we reflect on John, we can learn from his teaching.
4. First, John was persistent. His message was not a popular one, it was the voice of someone who lived on the margins of society. He lived we believe just beyond the Jordan, in a cell beneath where Elijah is said to have ascended to heaven. It is a hot, dusty place, with temperatures can reach 55C. It was here that we believe he dedicated himself to a life of prayer and austerity.
5. It was from this prayer that came his message, a message that we must repent, that we must be aware that the Kingdom of God is at hand.
6. In my Diocese, we are aware that many in our region do not feel the kingdom of God is at hand. We know that there are many needy families, refugees in our region and in different parts of our Land, who are knocking on doors day and night seeking food and protection. They feel abandoned by God, and abandoned by their neighbour.
7. If we meditate on John’s message in the light of the advent season, we know that we must learn to treat these outsiders as the incarnate one; as Christ in our midst and respond to them.
8. When we respond in love, in generosity and with hospitality, then we do reveal something of the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God is indeed near and revealed through our loving acts.
9. John preserved. His message was not universally liked; he spoke the truth in the face of great adversity and great personal risk. How was he equipped to do this?
10. He was equipped because he loved the Lord his God with all his heart, with all his mind and with all his soul. This allowed him not to seek earthly pleasures, but to focus on God’s will for him and those he encountered.
11. This is something that we can apply to the Christian presence in the Holy Land. For many Christians life in the Holy Land is very difficult; we are a minority, perhaps only 2%. In Gaza there are only 1000 Christians. Yet the Christians in the Holy Land have this steadfastness, this persistence not to give up, but to remain in the land where Christ lived. For some the pressure is too much and we tragically see some of our young people leaving.
12. The work of the Diocese of Jerusalem though is encouraged to be persistent. Through the ministry of its institutions, schools, hospitals, clinics and rehabilitation centres, when faced with their many difficulties, hardship, discouragement and even persecution in some parts of the Middle East, such as Syria, there is a need for a commitment of perseverance and persistence.
13. This perseverance and persistence, we also detect in this land, which has seen so many troubles. A determination not to give up, that God’s will, will be done.
14. It is a perseverance and persistence that we need to keep reminding ourselves of too. Too often it is easy to take the easy path. Yet Jesus calls us not to take this one, but to pick up our Cross and follow him.
15. I read recently that the Bishop of Uruguay has delivered a critical presidential address to his diocesan synod, in which he said that parishes had failed to engage with “the basics” of mission and evangelism. The bishop used the example of a new priest who received complaints that he had used the same sermon three week’s running. “Yes, it´s true. I have preached the same sermon every week for three weeks now. I know what I'm doing. . . When you begin to live out this sermon, I will go to the next one.”
16. John-the-Baptist was a persistent and radical man, living on locusts and wild honey and repeating his message again and again. There is wild honey near the place where he lived in Bethany beyond the Jordan. He must have seen the honeybee as it went from flower-head to flower-head, gathering the pollen that it turned into honey. While the message of John the Baptist was difficult to deliver, our response to him, while difficult, will bring sweet reward like the honey in the bee hive.
17. At times in our Christian lives and in our Church work and institutions, we will get tired, frustrated and discouraged but we must never relent. We must never stop welcoming, we must never stop praying, and we must never stop hoping.
18. In our region, this is an important message for both Israelis and Palestinians. It is, I believe, our persistence and perseverance that will not give way until a genuine peace prevails in the land of the Holy One.
19. John the Baptist’s message was repeated again and again. It was a message that he felt must be delivered to the people if they were to have a better future. It is a message that is as relevant now as it was then. We do need to repent, we need to realise that the Kingdom of God is at hand, and this advent we need to prepare our lives, our homes and our communities to welcome the Holy One revealed in the tenderness of a new born baby.
20. If we are persistent and if we persevere, then like the honeybee we will receive a sweet reward.

**AMEN**