



HOMILY OF THE MOST REV. DONALD BOLEN, ARCHBISHOP OF REGINA

**Second Sunday of Advent
December 5, 2021**

Today's Readings:

1st Reading: Baruch 5:1-9;

2nd Reading: Philippians 1:4-6, 8-11;

Gospel: Luke 3:1-6

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, in today's Gospel we hear John the Baptist crying out in the wilderness, "Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths. Every valley shall be filled and every mountain and hill shall be made low. The winding roads shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth, and all flesh shall see the salvation of God." It is an Advent message that helps us to get ready to celebrate the Incarnation, as we seek to repent of our failings and to change our ways in preparation of God's coming into our world. Years ago I heard a Chinese saying: "if you do not change directions, you are likely to end up where you are heading."

Over the past few years, through the Truth and Reconciliation process, we have heard many stories that ask change of us, and indirectly at least, invite us to prepare the way for the healing of relations and reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples, which is a way of preparing to welcome the Lord into our lives.

In today's first reading from the prophet Baruch, we hear of the exile of Israel, and the return from exile. "Up, Jerusalem! ...look to the east and see your children gathered from the east and the west.... Led away on foot by their enemies they left you: but God will bring them back to you." The psalm tells the same story: "Those who sow in tears shall reap rejoicing. Although they go forth weeping, carrying the seed to be sown, they shall come back rejoicing."

In the truth and reconciliation listening process, we heard of many who sowed in tears and went forth weeping, hurt in residential schools. Tears flowed from their eyes as parents had their little children forcibly taken from their arms. Tears flowed from the children's eyes when the clothes which had been specially bought for them by their parents or grandparents were stripped off them and replaced by a drab uniform. Tears flowed when these children had their precious and even sacred braids unceremoniously chopped from their heads and thrown into the garbage. Tears flowed when these very young children were punished for wetting their beds, or for speaking their Indigenous language, the only language they knew. Tears flowed when these children saw their classmates get very sick and die alone so far away from home. Tears flowed from their eyes when these children tried to fall asleep at night but could not, because the mush they were given to eat left them so hungry. Tears flowed at night when the lights went out and they were overwrought with a deep loneliness for home. Tears flowed when they or their classmates suffered physical, psychological, emotional, spiritual or sexual abuse. Tears flowed when out of desperation they ran away from that institution only to find themselves all alone, not knowing the way home to where they had longed and hoped to be hugged by their mothers, fathers and grandparents. As the psalmist says to us today, they went out weeping.

If we are to prepare the way for right relations with Indigenous Peoples, we need to hear those voices of suffering, and the voices of those experiencing intergenerational trauma. God has heard the suffering. And God wants us to hear that suffering too, and to open our hearts to it. Chief Cadmus Delorme of Cowessess First Nation here in Saskatchewan offered an important word to us earlier in the Summer that I invite you to take to heart. He said, "you know, in 2021, we all inherited this. Nobody today created residential schools. Nobody today created the Indian Act. Nobody today created the Sixties Scoop. But we all inherited this." And we all can do something about it. St. Paul says, when one member of the body suffers, we all suffer. And the prophet Joel says, rend your hearts. Let our hearts be broken open in listening to the waves of suffering. And let that move us communally to repent, to change, to action in solidarity with Indigenous Peoples, that we might walk together in building a future full of hope, where we carry each other's burdens, where they are lighter because we walk together.

Let us ask the Creator, to guide our present steps as the Indigenous delegation prepares to travel to Rome to meet Pope Francis. Let us ask the Spirit for the gift of healing, that those who went forth weeping, carrying seeds to be sown, might one day come back rejoicing. Let us ask Mohawk Saint Kateri Tekakwitha to accompany us in preparing the way of justice, the way of the Lord.