

## HOMILY 4<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY OF ADVENT

It is lovely that the last great Saints' feast day to be celebrated before Christmas is St John Cantius, co-patron saint of the parish of Broxburn. His feast day is 23 December.

Living mostly in the 15<sup>th</sup> Century, Pope Clement XIII wrote of him, "St John Cantius handed on a doctrine drawn from the purest sources of the faith. His sermons, in which he preached to the people, a holier way of life by his own life of humility, chastity and compassion".

To love a life of purity is an honourable and essential call of our Catholic Christian Faith. Purity means not allowing our minds to be corrupted by that which is sordid, hurtful, malicious and immoral. To protect that bond of pure love between ourselves and God and those we hold dear to. To model our lives on Jesus and his beloved saints. To protect and be true to our conscience.

In the Holy Scripture today, three people figure who are chosen by God – King David, St Paul and Mary, the Virgin of Nazareth. King David, shepherd boy chosen to be King, starts off well but the lure of power and the desires of the flesh lead him astray. He wants to get his conscience solved, by building God a lovely big Temple in Jerusalem. God replies, it is not so much the Temples we build for him, as the spiritual temples, our own bodies, which He wants us to build. In other words, the spiritual life of the believer. You cannot build the true church on corrupt Christians,

St Paul starts badly in life by worshipping the lure of authority given by the Romans and delighting in killing the Christians. Jesus saves him, makes him an Apostle and St Paul teaches us to find purity in life through love and fidelity to Jesus, to live the Gospel.

Mary, the third person to figure, last but not least, is conceived without sin. She is a young woman of purity of mind, body and soul, hence the Angel Gabriel announces, "Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with you". We must take heart and be encouraged that God sees in humanity those who are conceived pure but also those like St Paul who can, by conversion, become pure of heart, God's mercy is boundless.

Today, and I believe this is very important, the society we live in is being seriously attacked or undermined by much that is impure. This week, once more, a senior politician has resigned after his moral integrity has been found wanting, in regard to what he was viewing on the internet. Never before has our imagination and thoughts been so easily corrupted by what is accessible on social media, TV and the World Wide Web.

As Catholics, we have inherited the ancient Jewish customs of waiting and making ourselves clean before entering the Temple of the Lord, we signify now by blessing ourselves with Holy Water, on entering the Church and are expected to go to Confession before Communion if we are in a state of grave sin. But there are real dangers that we are ignoring the example of St John Cantius. That relativism, materialism and lack of moral fibre is allowing us to compromise our moral values and no longer live in purity of heart. To no longer allow our secret thoughts to be laid bare.

St Pope John Paul II wrote an important encyclical in 1992, I think, *Misericordia Sedes*, in which he challenged the Catholic Community over their lack of a sense of sin. That it is not the 'soiling' on the outside of our bodies that God is primarily concerned about but the 'soiling' of the within. Our lack of

purity, our minds and hearts being corrupted by a secular society that has no respect for God or the innocence of life. That, as a Church, we must, like St Paul, be a contradiction to immorality.

The Blessed Virgin Mary is the model for our call to purity. As the 'New Eve' she is the handmaid of God, helping in a key way, to rescue humanity from original sin, that the embarrassed nakedness of Adam and Eve, after the fall, is replaced by the sacrificial nakedness of Jesus, her son, born in a stable and eventually nailed to a cross, so that we can be clothed in moral righteousness.

Now it is for us, as Catholics of the present age, called through faith to purity of heart, to help rescue our society from all that is indecent, corrupt, immoral, degrading. All that destroys the innocence of childhood and overshadows our joy in this life. To start with our own moral conscience.

I will finish with the words of St John Cantius. "Live the true faith, teach it, defend it when attacked by enemies".

God Bless you all this Christmas Eve.