

5th December 2021 – Second Sunday in Advent

Prophets

“Leanabh an àigh mar dh'aithris na fàidhean.”

“Prophets foretold him, infant of wonder.”

Mary Macdonald, Child in a Manger

In his final novel, *The Brothers Karamazov*, the Russian novelist, Fyodor Dostoevsky, has one of his characters say this:

*Men reject their prophets and slay them,
but they love their martyrs and honour those whom they have slain.*

I don't know the book well enough to analyse the state of mind which gives voice to this statement. But Dostoevsky's words offer a troubling assessment of the human condition. Simply put, the world, through the ages of history, has not coped well with prophets, choosing at best to ignore them, or at worse to dispose of them altogether.

When I worked with *The Church of the Saviour* in Washington DC thirty years ago, I learned that all church enterprises were based on “Mission Groups”, small groups of people committed to the outworking of a common task. But before the “task” took shape, there were two stages of growth: the first was to embark on an “inward journey” of learning and prayerfulness, and the strengthening of relationships and trust. The second, a product of the first, was the “calling forth of gifts”. This was identifying specific gifts the members of the Mission Group had through which their inward and outward journeys could develop. There could be “the teacher”, someone who could offer learning to others; “the pastor”, a member identified as being the natural carer; “the prophet”, an individual whose gifts of wisdom and discernment were recognised and valued.

In any enterprise of faith, we value teaching, and rightly so. And how vital is pastoral care? But even in the best of groups and congregations, how reluctant we are to understand the prophet. We may even try to silence the prophetic voice, or rid ourselves of the prophet altogether.

On this Second Sunday of Advent, we remember that the Incarnation was preceded, over many centuries, by prophets who “foretold Him”. We need the prophets. Were they heeded then as they should have been? And what are we doing to the prophets of now?

A prayer for today

Let the prophets speak. Let the people listen. Let God's will be done. Amen

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