

## FOURTH SUNDAY OF YEAR C

When I visited my family recently we ended up watching an American film produced in 2021 entitled 'Don't Look Up'. Despite the bad language and some other aspects (it is rated 'R' which is for people aged 15 and above I understand), and the obvious comedy aspects, it was actually a very thought provoking film. Leonardo DiCaprio plays an astronomer whose team discovers a new comet the size of Mount Everest, only to then calculate that it is headed for a direct collision with earth in several months' time that will cause mass extinction. As the film unfolds, what becomes apparent is the falsehood of society, the many agendas and ulterior motives at work, and the inability of people to acknowledge the reality of what is certain to happen should nothing change.

Meryl Streep plays an American president who seems more interested in her poll ratings than in any impending disaster. DiCaprio and his colleague subsequently go onto a TV programme to try and get the message out there, only to find that it falls on deaf ears because the presenters are more interested in keeping everything light hearted and funny. Sir David Mark Rylance, meanwhile, plays a tech billionaire who sees a commercial opportunity in the approaching comet. The film seems to be a satire on cultures that have become so consumed with celebrity worship, social media popularity, technical advancement, unbridled capitalism and political gamesmanship that serious impending issues, such as climate change for example, are not taken seriously despite the warnings.

I can see parallels in today's readings. The prophet Jeremiah had the extremely difficult task of warning the people of Israel against the impending disaster of Babylonian invasion. The message was simple: If Israel would not turn back to worship God and depend upon Him alone, then they were doomed to slaughter and exile. What was Israel's response? The leaders fought against Jeremiah and tried to silence him. In fact, the Lord foretells Jeremiah that *'the kings of Judah, its princes, its priests and the country people... will fight against you'*. At one point, to stop the people hearing his message, Jeremiah was arrested and dumped in an empty well. Because Israel did not heed Jeremiah's message from God, they were indeed conquered by the Babylonians who slaughtered many of them and sent survivors into exile to Babylon.

In the gospel, meanwhile, Jesus comes to his home town, but his own people end up rejecting him too. Despite his words and the miracles that he has performed elsewhere, they are unable to see beyond his humanity to accept him as a prophet speaking God's word to them: *'This is Joseph's son, surely?'* After pointing out to them that *'no prophet is ever accepted in his own country'* and recalling the examples of Elijah and Elisha, instead of accepting the truth in humility, they close their hearts and ears to his message and try to silence him, *'intending to throw him down the cliff'*. The truth that they are trying to silence in this case, however, is of ultimate and eternal significance. If the people do not accept Jesus' word and repent by turning back to God, then they risk having no place in his Kingdom and being lost eternally. The same truth applies to us today.

What is it about the human condition that cannot stand the truth when it is presented to us? When our hearts are hardened, it seems that we would do anything to silence the truth of our predicament, and carry on in our own perceived comfortable worlds of unreality rather change. It is, I believe, what is behind the present 'cancel culture' that I touched on two weekends ago, where individuals or groups of people are effectively ostracised because they have differing opinions. As I mentioned then, the present Synod can teach us something about rediscovering at least the art of dialogue.

While we seek to follow the Lord and to be faithful to him, we all come to realise that we have areas of untruth and unreality in our lives, where we may prefer to compromise rather than, with God's grace, change how we think and behave and come under obedience to Christ and the demands of His eternal Kingdom.

When it comes to being a people of love, St. Paul's words to the Corinthians in today's second reading provide all of us with an examination of conscience:

- Am I impatient?
- Am I unkind?
- Am I jealous?
- Am I boastful?
- Am I conceited?
- Am I rude?
- Am I selfish?
- Do I take offence?
- Am I resentful?
- Do I take pleasure in other people's sins?

St. Paul goes on to encourage us:

- To delight in the truth
- To trust and hope in God
- To endure whatever comes

God bless,

Fr Andy