Homily for the First Sunday in Advent A – 2011 (read only)

I love listening to Edith Piaf singing *non je ne regret rien.*

At first it sounds defiant and indeed that is one of its attractions; but it is a defiance rooted in hope, the hope which is born of love for another. Clearly this lover is aware of her previous mistakes and troubles but does not hold these things against her. This frees her to cast her past behind her and embrace the future with renewed confidence and joy. She sings of her past being ‘paid, wiped away, forgotten’ as for her pains and troubles she rejoices ‘I don’t need them anymore… I have swept them away’. And she concludes ‘I have no regrets because from today, my life, my happiness, everything, starts with you!’

What a good message this is for Advent.

The beginning of a new liturgical year like the start of any new year is a moment of opportunity. The opportunity presented by Advent is the opportunity to rediscover, or perhaps discover properly for the first time, that we really are loved by God.

Appropriately enough the very first scripture we hear is the prophet Isaiah speaking to God on behalf of the people. The passage opens with the recognition that God is both Father and Redeemer (one who pays the price for our mistakes). We then hear Isaiah raking over these mistakes: hardening hearts, straying from the path, rebelling, integrity that has ‘withered like leaves’, failure to invoke God’s name (perhaps sweeping faith under the carpet or being ashamed of our belief). The consequence of this is that God’s people can lose direction, hope and purpose…

Unless, that is, we allow ourselves to recover the sense that God has fashioned us with care and love; as the potter crafts the clay. Isaiah then, is not trying to stir up regret he is trying to open eyes and hearts to new possibilities, a better future.

In a few moments I will be reading some words written by an American woman called Nadine Stair. She composed them when she was 85 year old. They express some regret and sadness at missed opportunities and for being too cautious and careful. But they also reveal that she knew what mattered in life was that which gives what the French call *joie de vivre* – the joy of being alive. It makes for a better examination of conscience than you would find in any book of devotions; perfect for the start of a new year.

If I had my life to live over again,

I’d dare to make more mistakes next time.

I’d relax. I’d limber up.

I’d be sillier than I’ve been this trip.

I would take fewer things seriously.

I would take more chances,

I would eat more ice cream and less beans.

I would, perhaps, have more actual troubles but fewer imaginary ones.

you see, I’m one of those people who was sensible and sane,

hour after hour, day after day.

Oh, I’ve had my moments.

If I had to do it over again,

I’d have more of them.

In fact, I’d try to have nothing else- just moments,

one after another, instead of living so many years ahead of each day.

I’ve been one of those persons who never goes anywhere without a thermometer, a hot-water bottle, a raincoat, and a parachute.

If I could do it again, I would travel lighter than I have.

If I had to live my life over,

I would start barefoot earlier in the spring

and stay that way later in the fall.

I would go to more dances,

I would ride more merry-go-rounds,

I would pick more daisies.

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