

Donnybrook

2 December 2021

Welcome

Some years ago, I was on the West Bank (Israel), hiking to an archaeological site, a hilltop fortress. It was a beautiful day, a bit too warm for hiking and we were about twenty or so altogether. On the way up, we skirted a dry river bed, wide and empty. At top, there was time to look around and take in the panorama. In the distance, rain clouds could be seen, moving in our direction and shortly after we started our descent it began to pour.

There's a particular kind of soil in that part of the Holy Land called loess. It has a peculiar property: when it rains loess becomes impermeable. As a result, water is not absorbed but stays on the surface. A dry river bed can suddenly become a life-threatening torrent. This is exactly what happened. By the time we reached the road to catch a bus, a powerful river had formed in what had been the dry river bed, sudden and dangerous.

Topic

This is the local knowledge behind today's Gospel.

Steps

To build your house on sand was to choose a dry river bed as the location for your home, a wadi. This is something nobody with any intelligence would do. And the Gospel is right: Rain came down, floods rose, gales blew and struck that house, and it fell; and what a fall it had!

By contrast, to build your house on rock was to choose a place of safety, away from the wadi, where the floods simply would not reach you.

Conclusion

The teaching of Jesus could hardly be clearer. If we want to withstand whatever life throws at us, we should listen to his words and act on them. A good invitation for Advent.