

Second Sunday of Advent

December 8, 2024

This Second Sunday of Advent, my dear friends, challenges us to prepare a royal highway in our hearts so that we may receive Jesus as our saving God on Christmas. We should also be prepared for Christ's daily coming into our lives in the Holy Eucharist, in the Holy Bible, in everyone we encounter, and in the praying community.

In the first reading, the prophet Baruch introduces us to Yahweh, the God of Israel, preparing the way for, and leading the Babylonian exiles to Jerusalem. Hence, the prophet invites the weeping people of Jerusalem to rejoice and go to high places to watch the return of the exiles.

In the second reading, St. Paul advises the Philippians and us to prepare ourselves for Christ's Second Coming by practicing Christian love and by leading pure and blameless lives. John the Baptist, in today's Gospel, challenges the Jews and us to prepare our lives for receiving our long-awaited Messiah. We are challenged to prepare a highway in our hearts for our Messiah by leveling the mountains of pride and the valleys of impurity, injustice, and neglect and straightening our crooked ways.

As you may recall, a couple of weeks ago we celebrated the Solemnity of Christ the King. And we were asked to consider the place Jesus has in our lives. Is he important? Is he our top priority? Is he our focus? Is he our friend, our brother and our savior? Simply, is he truly our King? All good stuff to reflect on, essential stuff if we want to truly live as children of God, as his disciples.

And if you are like me you probably got a particular image of Jesus in your mind as you first heard or realized the title of that particular celebration. And what is that image? It's an image of Jesus wearing a crown and sitting on some sort of throne. Regal. Powerful. Majestic. Oh, and one more - immovable. In a way, not unlike the image we have of the statue of President Lincoln at his memorial in Washington D.C.

There is something comforting in this sort of image, something reassuring. Our God is in control. Our God is in charge. Our God is not swayed by anyone or anything, completely confident in all he does and all he is. And that provides us with a certain kind of spiritual security, an understanding that even when we can't count on ourselves, we can count on our God. Christ is our King, and that I believe is a very good thing.

But what that image doesn't convey is a profound truth regarding our God in one particular respect. You see, when we imagine Jesus (or God the Father) sitting on his throne it might give us the impression that our God isn't going anywhere. He's just kind of sitting there watching all that's going on - static, immutable, almost frozen in place. And nothing could be further from the truth.

But rather, ours is a God who is on the move.

Advent, my dear friends, is a yearly reminder of the most perfect expression of this truth. We remember, we celebrate, and we give thanks for that profound moment, the day our God came to us in the most complete way possible.

And by doing so he revealed to us who God is and who we are called to be. Of course, this "visit", this "coming to us" was not without a cost. In the end, it cost God everything. Yet, in the process he won "everything" for us. That's an incredible mystery that is hard to wrap our minds around at times.

And while the birth of Jesus is the greatest manifestation of, the greatest "proof" that our God isn't off somewhere far away, watching from the sidelines, we know that God has visited his creation in other ways too since the dawn of time. He made clear his presence in the garden to our first parents. He made himself known to Noah, Abraham and Moses. He revealed himself to prophets down through the centuries. And he even made himself known to two people of little significance - Joseph and Mary, whose cooperation would help steer all of creation on a new course.

Yes, our God is always on the move, always seeking out his creatures, always doing all he can to “get” to us, speak to us, challenge us, and lead us.

So, are we the ones who have it much easier, the ones who can simply remain where we are, remain still, remain “frozen” waiting for our God to find us? Or do we have an essential role to play, a faith-filled responsibility to help bring about the outcome we desire so deeply, a responsibility to help bring about countless encounters with our God as we journey through life? I think you know the answer.

In today’s Gospel reading from St. Luke we see the author reference a well-known passage from Isaiah and link it to John the Baptist. He is the “voice crying out in the desert”. As you know, these verses are incredibly familiar to us.

**“Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight
his paths. Every valley
shall be filled and every mountain
and hill shall be made low.”**

You may have missed it, but our First Reading from the Prophet Baruch echoed those same thoughts, although he was talking about the day when the Jewish people would be free to return from captivity in Babylon.

The images are the same in both - the leveling of mountains and the filling in of valleys. In Isaiah, it’s so that God can get to where God needs to be. And in Baruch it’s so that the Jewish people can get to where they need to be.

And so, not only is God not sitting and waiting for us to come to him, we’re not supposed to be sitting and waiting our whole lives for God to come to us either. Rather, we are called (in faith) to seek God in all things while at the same time being sure to remove any obstacles that might make it hard for God to come to us in the complete way he wants. It’s a beautiful sort of image, two people who love each other so much that they can’t wait to be in each other’s presence, can’t wait to embrace one

another, can't wait to be joined up, journeying through life side-by-side or hand-in-hand.

So while we spend this holy season anticipating our God once again breaking into our world, breaking into our lives, breaking into our hearts, let's make sure that we are getting rid of whatever might be in the way, whatever might make our encounters with God less than they can be, and certainly less than what God wants them to be.

What are those mountains? What are those valleys? Well, they're particular to each of us, so I really can't answer that for you. But they need to be gone, they need to be out of the way. And while our loving God pursues us, let's also rush out to meet him. It just might become the life-changing encounter we've been waiting for.