

2nd Sunday of Advent
Dec. 5 & 6, 2015

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All Saints Parish, Syr., NY

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Over the radio we will hear that old tune sometime during these next days: “I’ll Be Home for Christmas.” That’s kind of like what Isaiah is telling the Chosen People who believe in God. A time is coming when they will be home in Jerusalem and their captivity in a foreign land will be over. It was a message of hope, a message to let them know that God is ever present. God is intimately present in a way the people had not yet known assisting them in clearing the way to freedom and fullness of life. God would help them clear every obstacle to have God dwell among them. So, says God to Isaiah, shout with joy to announce this Good News!!

In fact, not only Isaiah, but John, the baptizing prophet is giving a message of hope. Prepare! Get ready! Yes, he shouted that to the people to wake them up! Something very different is about to happen and its time you people get ready for it! Get ready by repenting, because the Kingdom of God is at hand! Wow! What bravado! What fire! John quotes Isaiah, saying that “God has commanded that every lofty mountain be made low, and every valley filled in. So that the people may advance in joy being led by the light of God’s glory, with God’s mercy and justice for company. Interesting to note where John is baptizing and to whom. He baptized in the wilderness, not in the synagogue, the temple, the governor’s palace. He preaches a second chance to life to the prostitutes, beggars, mercenaries, and lepers. This is where Jesus comes, This is where Jesus is given the Holy Spirit to do the same in his ministry of preaching and healing. To attend to the outcast, the disenfranchised, the little and least. This is the one we are called to follow. This is the one who calls us to advance in joy!

These are encouraging words, words of joy for us to on our sojourn home. A sojourn home to who we are truly meant to be! Sometimes we lose our way. That's why John the Baptist called the people to repent, which at that time meant *change the direction of your life*. Be open to God's movement in your life. Recall God's promise to be with you and your side of the promise, to believe in the workings of God in every moment. So straighten out your crooked ways. Be lifted out of sadness and mourning! Remove all barriers and smooth out all your rough edges.

Perhaps you have decorated for Christmas. We have; our Christmas crèche has been up in our house since the 26th! In fact, we have three creche's. One of my favorite pastimes as a kid was to keep moving around the figures. Every year I lead a pilgrimage to Assisi and in a little town called Greccio, there are 100's of Christmas scenes from around the world. Some have very contemporary figures in them, people you may see today on the streets. They are all around the balcony of a church which is set over a cave where St. Francis celebrated one special Christmas.

Two weeks before Christmas he asked a Knight, who has been a friend of his and a villager, to get an ox and a donkey, and put some hay in a manger, and alert the townspeople that they are to come to a cave, near Francis' hut on Christmas Eve. The people came all dressed up, thinking that this was going to be a very special Mass and celebration. Upon arriving at the cave, they were shocked to see an altar set over the manger and an ox and donkey in the cave. St. Francis' purpose was to reveal to the people that God, the Creator of all, chose to come to us as a poor baby, homeless, cold, and in the midst of stench from the beasts of burden. And that's how God always comes to us... in the ordinary, in the meekest of conditions, in the human person.

So let us wake to the fact that God is here, now, coming to us in every ordinary and familiar place in our lives. God continues to enter history, God enters as flesh and blood in a world that knows joy, suffering, beauty, pain, tragedy and comedy. Our world. Imagine that. God chose to bless humanity by being one with us.

Let me end with this story: One day God wished to reveal God's self to a peasant and commissions an angel. The angel speaks to the peasant saying: "God wishes to be revealed to you in whatever manner you desire. How do you wish to see God?" This puzzled the peasant. Scratching his head and pausing for a few moments, the peasant finally responded, "I am a poor man, not worthy to see God face to face. But if it is God's will and desire to be revealed to me, let it be in those things with which I am familiar. Let me see God in the earth I plow, in the water I drink, in the food I eat. Let me see God in the faces of my family, neighbors, and—if God deems it good for myself and others – even in my own reflection of him as well." (Victor M. Parachin, from Eastern Wisdom for Western Minds)