

The Second Sunday of Advent © - December 9, 2018

(Baruch 5:1-9; Ps. 126; Philippians 1:4-6,8-11; Luke 3:1-6;)

Our first reading today is from Baruch. He was at first the secretary to the prophet Jeremiah and later God spoke to the people through him – he became a prophet. Today he is speaking to the people of Jerusalem. Years earlier they had been overtaken by the King of Babylon. All the leaders and craftsmen had been taken captives to Babylon, which is now Iraq. Some of the poor were left behind. God reassuring them that the children of those who were taken captive will return and Jerusalem will once more prosper. “Led away on foot by their enemies they left you: but God will bring them back to you borne aloft in glory as on royal thrones. For God has commanded that every lofty mountain be made low, and that the age-old depths and gorges be filled to level ground, that Israel may advance secure in the glory of God.” God wants nothing to hinder them in coming back to him and to the promised land – their heritage.

Five centuries later St. Luke is writing about what God is again doing for his people that they may return to him. He first names all of the public leaders at that time, Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate, Herod and his brother Philip. He even mentions the high priests Annas and Caiaphas. But then he says, in spite of all the important leaders, the word of God came to John the son of Zechariah in the desert. John was not an important leader. Even though his father Zechariah had been a priest, he was not a high priest that year. He shows that often God does not speak through the mighty and important people but rather the humble and insignificant.

St. Luke goes on, “John went throughout the whole region of the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, as it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah: A voice of one crying out in the desert: “Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths. Every valley shall be filled and every mountain and hill shall be made low. The winding roads shall be made straight and the rough ways made smooth, and all flesh shall see the salvation of

God.” God is once again promising to let the people return to him and in fact he is coming to them.

As we prepare to celebrate the birth of the Son of God among us, prepare to receive Jesus and at the same time prepare for his coming we might ask ourselves what mountain is keeping me from God. What valley or rough road is preventing God from being a more prominent part of my life. We may have even recognized those things in our lives but keep putting off taking care of them. Are we so concerned about our financial situation that we forget about God. Are we so busy doing one thing or another, that is on my calendar, that I just run out of time for God? Do I remember that when I take care of the needs of someone less fortunate that I really do it for God? God did not send his son to the biggest city or the best house in town or to the family with the most talent or most important friends. If it wasn't for the angels telling the shepherds, the local people would never have known.

If we wonder how can I prepare for him? How can God be a more important fixture in my life? We must realize that God himself will make a way for us if we look for it. In fact he has already and will continue. St. Paul says, in his letter to the Philippians: “Brothers and sisters: I pray always with joy in my every prayer for all of you, because of your partnership for the gospel from the first day until now. I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work in you will continue to complete it until the day of Christ Jesus.” God himself will help us accomplish this, if we let him. We still have the prayers of St. Paul and all of the saints looking after us.

We have the help of Jesus himself in the sacraments. John preached a baptism of repentance. That was only a sign of the baptism that takes away sins. It was an action and promise of those who were baptized, but now we have God himself working through the sacraments. The sacrament of Penance is a sacrament where God works together with us – we for our part make the effort to come. We confess our sins and our sorrow, with the intent of trying to do better. But God,

through the priest, wipes away our sins and gives us Penance as a remedy and his grace as his help to strengthen our relationship with him.

I often think of another part of Luke's gospel when Jesus talks about two sons of a farmer. The older son was always working diligently for the father, but when the younger son came of working age, instead of working for the father he asked the father for his share of the inheritance. Though it was an insult to the father, the father gave it to him. The son sold it, took the money and went off to a distant land and spent it foolishly. When it was all gone and times were tough he remembered that his father was a good man and had hired workers. He then realized the offense he had committed against his father. He decided to go home ask his father for forgiveness and for a job. In telling this story Jesus said that when the son was still a long way off the father caught sight of him. He must have been looking every day for his return. The father didn't wait for the son to reach him, but ran out to meet him with open arms. That is how our heavenly father waits and watches for us to approach him and he comes to help us.

Besides examining those things that keep us away from God, we also need to see how might I help others return to the Father who always loves and watches for us? Marcus Grodi, a former minister and convert to the Catholic Faith, for the last fifteen years has been helping others return to the Faith and interviews those who have returned. He says there are usually one of two reasons they come into the Church. One is they want the guarantee of true teaching, which Jesus has given the Catholic Church. The other reason is our belief and teaching that the bread and wine become the body and blood of Jesus, and his soul and divinity. They want it for themselves. But many of them also say that there is one thing that kept them from coming in sooner – that Catholics often don't live what they profess to believe. So we also need to ask ourselves, do we invite others to come to the sacraments? And do others see Jesus through me? I encourage you to receive the sacraments often and to pray each day for the promise of Jesus, the gift of the Holy Spirit that we may witness Jesus and his Faith to others. God bless you...