

SECOND ADVENT - C

Every year on the Second Sunday of Advent we are presented with the figure of John the Baptist who fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah of "a voice crying out in the desert, 'Prepare the way of the Lord.'"

In one sense, it seems that the timeline of Advent moves us from the future to the past.

We started last Sunday with the return of Jesus at the end of time, and today John the Baptist heralds the appearance of Jesus in his public ministry.

By the Fourth Sunday of Advent we will have "gone backwards" to the events preceding Christ's birth in Bethlehem.

Future coming ... first coming ... Advent is meant to prepare us for both.

And then there is Jesus's third coming: his "present coming" into our lives.

Jesus is always seeking to come into our lives every day, every minute of the day.

Being aware of this "present coming" of Christ is really the heart of the spiritual life.

If Jesus is not alive and active in our life right now, religion is just an exercise in theater or wishful thinking.

But Jesus is alive ... Jesus is active in our lives... here and now! That's the Good News!

We hear this Good News foreshadowed in the sweeping poetry of the First Reading from the Book of the Prophet Baruch there is a key phrase we might have missed:

"Jerusalem ... see your children gathered from the east and the west at the word of the Holy One, rejoicing that they are remembered by God."

To be "remembered by God" ... what a profound description of the presence and action of God in our lives!

St. Paul puts it this way: "I am confident that the one who began a good work in you will continue to complete it until the day of Christ."

Through the power of the Holy Spirit given to us through Jesus, the Father is fulfilling the work of salvation in your life and in mine.

The season of Advent reminds us that we have to be prepared for this present coming of God in our lives.

St. Luke quotes the prophet Isaiah's description of the preparations that need to be made for the coming of the Lord in terms of what I call "spiritual road repair":

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"Every valley shall be filled and every mountain made low. The winding roads shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth."

In my life I know that one of the valleys that needs to be filled is the time for silence and reflection that is sometimes missing from my day.

It's easy to get caught up in all the things I "need" to be doing, and forget to take the time for the most important thing of all: prayer.

It doesn't have to be a huge block of time, but it should at least be as much as the time I spending checking out Facebook, shouldn't it?

One of the mountains that I have been working on leveling is my tendency to be impatient with myself and others.

I need to be renewed in my experience of the mercy of God more often so that I can become more merciful and patient towards the people I encounter each day.

When it comes to winding ways that need to be made straight we can probably each think of the excuses we sometimes make to get around doing the good things we know we should be doing.

And of course, there are the rationalizations we come up with for doing things we shouldn't.

Finally, Isaiah calls us, and Advent reminds us, to cooperate with God's grace by smoothing out the rough edges of our lives.

In today's Second Reading St. Paul prays that the Christian community may increase ever more and more in love.

I think of his beautiful description of love in his First Letter to the Corinthians:

"Love is patient, love is kind. It is not jealous, it is not rude ... it is not quick-tempered, it does not brood over injuries."

I would add that love does not yell at people, it does not curse, it does not slam doors, and it does not forget to say "please" and "thank you."

Jesus comes to us in the present ordinary moments of our daily lives.

Let us prepare our hearts to receive him, and by receiving him, to give birth to him, in the way we live our lives each day.