

Homily Year C Advent 2nd Sunday

Advent is a hopeful season. Hope is such an important Christian virtue, something deeper than simple optimism of temperament. We can feel cheerfully optimistic about all kinds of things, but, strictly speaking, the true object of hope is union with God. Baruch, in the first reading, asks the grieving Jerusalem to stand on the heights in order to see her scattered children coming home, with God in the lead. This reminds us that all of us, like Israel in her exile, have been led into the captivity of sin. Hence, we are in need of restoration and conversion by the Word of the Holy One. Psalm 126 is a joyous song of ascent, sung by pilgrims on their way to Jerusalem. We see those who had gone into exile weeping, now returning “rejoicing, carrying their sheaves.” The second reading (from Philippians) was written out of a very dark situation in the life of St Paul. He was chained in a Roman prison, probably in Ephesus. It is clear from that letter, that he wasn’t at all sure of getting out of jail alive. Yet, even though his situation when he wrote was dark and unpromising, the letter itself is the most hopeful and joyful of all Paul’s letters. The mood of this letter tells us that it is possible to remain hopeful even when things look very dark. From his prison cell, Paul cheerfully recalls all the progress Philippians have made so far as a local church. He praises how they helped to spread the good news from the days they first heard it, right up to the present.

We can be tempted in dark times to look at everything and everyone with jaundiced eyes. We need to look at ourselves and at others with hopeful eyes. Thus, we are meant, like John the Baptist, to prepare ourselves for the coming of Jesus as our Saviour. We need to examine our conscience to see what in our lives requires straightening out. The imagery about filling in the valleys and levelling mountains and hills is a call to be more concerned to get justice for all of God’s people. In sporting language one could say that, the Baptist called for a level playing field for all, so that everybody has fair access to the amenities and produce of this world. He was against selfish hoarding, dominance and aggression. The final words of today’s gospel tells that “all people will see the salvation sent to us from our God.” This is the direct result of making straight the ways of the Lord, filling the valleys, levelling the mountains, straightening the curves, and making smooth the rough places. We can all identify these areas in our lives. God is always calling on us to respond to him. Responding to him is to become responsible. I have responsibility for my actions, and become willing to face up to the truth avoiding the tendency to look for a softer, easier way.

A man and his wife were having some problems, so they decided to try silent therapy. The following week, the man realized that he needed his wife to wake him at 5 a.m. He had to catch an early flight, but he didn’t want to be the first one to break the silence. So, he wrote on a piece of paper: “Please wake me at 5 a.m.” The next morning the man woke up, but it was already 9 a.m. He missed his flight! He was furious and started screaming at his wife, but she just showed him a piece of paper next to his bed. “It’s 5 a.m. Wake up.” So, during this Holy Period of Advent when we prepare ourselves for the coming of Our Lord, what should our response be? There can be two responses on our part: Firstly, we need once more to hear the challenging call of John the Baptist to baptism of repentance & forgiveness, and connect ourselves to the ocean of God's mercy; And secondly, we have to realize that our own role is not unlike that of John the Baptist - like him, each one of us has a mission to communicate the message of hope, love, freedom and peace to others, so that - “ALL FLESH SHALL SEE THE SALVATION OF THE LORD!”