

Advent Newsletter 2015



Dec 06, 2015 Second Sunday of Advent

ADVENT ROOTS US IN REALITY

One of the sharp and correct criticisms that is leveled at the spirituality of so many people is that they locate the things of God in the 'church building' and 'when I am doing spiritual things.' If you stand on the incorrect side of the starting gate you might miss running the race!



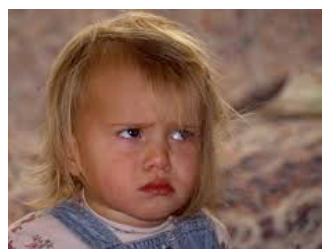
God is everywhere!
God is moving in the sharp December breeze, in the ordinary action of wiping up the floor and in the dull conversation of your

co-worker. The starting place for us to locate God is in daily life. The more refined place to locate God would be in the church building.

During these four Sundays of Advent we begin with the prophets speaking words of encouragement to the exiles in Babylon (they were there for seventy years). These Hebrew people went through periods of deep discouragement. Why had God abandoned them? How could they have been chosen to be God's people and ended up in such dismal straits?

The prophets helped them to see how God was very much active in their sufferings and the confusion. God was very much present in the foreign land. Think of the lament of Psalm 137: How could I sing the Lord's song on this foreign soil?

The first lesson this bulletin wants to convey is that the correct place to look for God is in daily life. Be like your ancestors from of old. They discovered God in a foreign land where they were held captive (they were convinced that no one could discover God on the soil of the Gentiles). The prophets were to teach them otherwise. It would be through the prophets that they began to experience God in a radical new way. Should we not expect as much in these four weeks of Advent?



Give Psalm 137 a try:

Read only the first six verses of Psalm 137 (the psalm turns into hate literature a little later on).

Be with the discouraged people, down and crying, giving up their treasured music (hung up our harps). When in your life and the life of your parish have you felt so discouraged that you wanted to give up.... And maybe even give up on God. Now, these Scriptures speak to us. You can see how God has worked in the past when people were so down, and you can see how God can work in our own discouraged lives.

THE THREE PATHS YOU NEED TO PREPARE

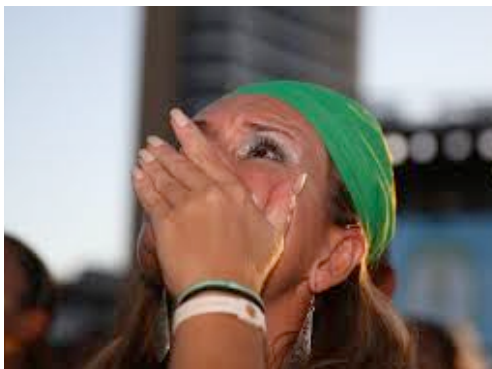
The image of John the Baptist calling out to the people to 'prepare the way of the Lord' has captured our Advent longing. The message is clear: God is coming and will break into your lives in new ways. Do not be asleep on the job. Be alert. If you expect no visitors this week, you are reluctant to give your house a good cleaning. But one phone call that five of your close friends are dropping over in a hour will send you into one beehive of cleaning, dusting and putting things in order. You are getting ready! Here are three paths you need to prepare this Advent.

The path of a just world



Stand in the world where the poor have no work. They have no resources to support their families. If there is any work, they must work for starvation wages. They are taken advantage of. How many of the garment workers in Bangladesh are paid subsistence wages so that the First World can have cheap clothing? Stand with these people. Listen to their strength to survive and give a decent life for their children. Pay careful attention to their strong trust in God to be with them. The first path that we must work on is towards creating a more just world where all peoples (women and men) are treated fairly and paid a living wage. How does this first path feel beneath your feet?

The path of a faithful Church



We must always think of our Church as it is lived at the grass roots. In other words, the Church is us: right here, right now. What you see in your local parish church is what you get! The Church (the people) were meant to be the living sign of Jesus Christ. How we act and the standards we set are what kind of sign we give Jesus. If we are trying to reach out to each other in all our differences, trying to understand each other and bring healing to each other, then the Church is the living sign of Jesus Christ. We are not perfect but we are witnessing to Christ. This second path always includes the entire parish community working towards the fullness of Jesus Christ. Walk on this second path, supported by your fellow believers who also are turning towards the ways of Christ. May this path be a living sign of Christ.

The path of personal conversion



The hardest path to trudge is within our own hearts. We have accepted Christ into our lives but there are still deep potholes of selfishness, greed and angry resentments towards others. We do not live in harmony with the very Spirit of God and our fellow human beings. There are sharp, rough stones on our path that hinder the practice of love, justice and peace on a daily basis. There is much work to be done within our own souls. There are many sinful stones that need to be removed from the path within our own heart. Advent is the challenge to recognize our own path with all its pitfalls.



THE WORD OF GOD COMES IN DAILY LIFE

When the command comes in Advent to “be alert” it is not spoken in a church building. It is

spoken in the mess of daily life. God comes to each one of us on a daily basis. Always remember that the great events of our salvation did not happen in a prayer house. It happened outside in public view of

everyone. Jesus died in a very public way. His birth happened in a very public place. God was breaking in right among us. One of the corrections that must happen today in our church is to see the signs of God manifest on the city bus, in the line up at the bank and at the nursing home. Maybe God is moving our eyes to pay attention to the elderly neighbor who has a hard time getting to her doctor’s appointments. When we reach out to help this person we are reaching out to help our God. No one can separate our hands helping our neighbor from our hands helping God. Pay attention. Do not miss this moment of grace.



You may stumble

Gracie, who volunteered to help the elderly regain their walking added a new insight. “The one thing helping my elderly grandmothers to walk again has taught me is to pay attention to where you are walking. There are things that could cause you to slip. When you could be in danger you are more alert!”

Advent calls us to look at the path on which we are walking. What along the way could cause us to slip and perhaps break a hip?

On the path of almost everyone is business. We are working so hard and involved in so many projects that we are exhausted. There is no



more time for God, for prayer or to simply enjoy being in the Lord’s presence.

Maybe the obstacles of business life do not trip you up but it does block your way with God. At the end of the day you are just too tired to pay any attention to God. This is the number one obstacle on our path with God.

Lift up your feet!

Do you remember when you were a kid, walking towards something at your own pace, and your impatient father would give you the command: “Pick up your feet.” Simply put, do not doddle and waste time. Get going. That command shook you out of your



own daydreaming and got you in tune with your father’s project.

The ‘voice on one crying out in the desert’ that John the Baptist gives to the church is such a command. Pick up your feet when you are concerned only with your own life style and your self-centered concerns. Your life has become short on breath! You are not breathing with all your lung capacity because you have become too narrow.

Pick up your feet so that you are not dragging your ego-concerns into your daily life. Be not concerned about yourself but listen to the pain and suffering of others.

GOD IS BUT AN EAR SHOT AWAY!



If you did not have the best of sleep last night and you woke up grumpy, you have two choices to make. Will I remain grumpy for the rest of the day (and have a real miserable day) or will I choose to be bright and bring goodness to the lives of all the people I meet? Simply put, will I try to see the very face of Jesus in all the people I will meet today?

The first place to be attentive to the movement of God is in our prayer. When you read the gospel selection for this Sunday listen to the ‘voice crying in the desert.’ Perhaps God is speaking to us in the cries of the lonely and the forgotten. It may be the suffering of others in refugee

camp throughout the world that cry out for help. It may be our own elderly mother, who in her dementia, is lonely. She does not need any words spoken to her but the gentle touch of her son or daughter holding her hand. The voice of God may be in the warmth of human kindness.

Make the path straight

The scriptures are full of the image of a ‘straight path’ which means practicing honesty and not cheating and exploiting people. In the digital world where it would be so easy to scam the innocent, practice what is contrary. Be honest in all your words and all your dealings with others. May your reputation be one who is a straight-shooter who does what is right in all things. Make your footsteps honest in all things.

Fill in the potholes

The prophet is very poetic and uses the image of filling in the valleys, which means the deep depression in the road. This Advent, fill in the potholes on your own path of resentments and clinging to past wrongdoings. Seek not to get even but change this evil into goodness.

Seeing God where God is at

Advent keeps us rooted in the Holy Spirit



If a person keeps God in the ‘holy places’ then you do not need to deal with the real God. You just have to go to God when you ‘feel like it.’ When you see God in the real place, that is in daily life, we need to respond to God, sometimes in uncomfortable ways. God may come to us in our own fifteen year old son who is just discouraged and wanting to quit!

This is a moment to ask what God wants to reveal to us today. What is being shared with us in and through these moments of discouragement of our fifteen year old?

This must lead to a daily sense of alertness.

If the highest obstacle on our path is that of business, then the greatest gift that we can receive this Advent is attentiveness. We pay attention to the unexpected coming of God among us. The coming of Christ may come in those moments of reaching out to help others. It may come in those very inconvenient moment when people ask for help. The coming of Christ is a ‘now’ event. Christ has been revealed in great ways in our past, but continues to come to us in the here and how. Our task is to pay attention to God.