

2nd Sunday of Advent, Year C (hope)

This Gospel is a bit different than the ones we have been hearing the last few weeks. Gone are the references to the apocalypse or the end times.

Instead, we have this long list of people who...unless you are a history buff... don't really mean a lot to us, with the exception of John the Baptist, of course.

And while **exactly** who these people are is not immediately important to us, Luke's reason for including them is important.

In the Old Testament, whenever one of the major prophets is introduced to us, he is announced at a particular place and time. That is, we know where he lives, when he lived and who his king is... even before we know what his message is.

It is a way of establishing that the person was real, and not just some story or myth.

Another reason for the list of people in Luke's Gospel is to show that those in power at the time of John were not the brightest and the best of leaders, either secular or Jewish. It is a sort of litany of villains.

Luke's intent is not only to establish a time and place for John, but to make sure we understand the situation in which he preached and that he is indeed a great prophet....therefore giving credibility to his message.

And what is the message of John the Baptist?

Really, it was nothing new, nothing that hadn't been said before. In fact, in this section of Luke's Gospel, we don't even hear John's words, but rather, those of Isaiah.

Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths.

Advent, is a season of preparing for the coming of Christ. We prepare best by repentance.

It is a time to examine our consciences and to recall

- all of the mountains our transgressions have made higher
- and all of the valleys our sins have made deeper
- and all of the rough and crooked roads that our hatred and anger and prejudices have made rougher and more crooked.

It is a time to turn away from all of these things and, by seeking God's forgiveness and help, making the way smooth for the Lord to heal us and bring us peace and joy.

(PAUSE)

Luke clearly means business when he speaks to us. But when we read his words in context with the other readings of today, the call to repent is made among messages of great hope.

The Prophet Baruch's words in the first reading are especially hope-filled:

Jerusalem, take off your robe of mourning and misery; put on the splendor of glory from God forever:.....and.....God will show all the earth your splendor!

The Church Fathers tell us that when Scripture speaks of Jerusalem, then it is speaking of the Church, for we are the New Jerusalem. So Baruch's words are for today as well..... for you and for me and for all the Baptized.

These words were written, by the way, while Israel was deep into exile in Babylonand Jerusalem was essentially a pile of ruins.

Incidentally, the words Luke quotes from Isaiah...they were written during the same exile.

Paul speaks words of encouragement and hope as well. Listen to what he says to us: **I pray always with joy in my every prayer for all of you**, and he says he is **confident... that the one who began a good work in you will continue to complete it until the day of Christ Jesus!**

Paul wrote this passage while being in prison.

One key message of today's readings, then, is that our God is not a God of despair but of Hope and of Joy.

In our Catholic understanding, repentance and hope and joy are rightly ordered....one with the others.

We are preparing to commemorate the Incarnation. In other words, we recall and we will celebrate the fact that God loves us so much He became like us in all things but sin. The Incarnation is the **fruit** of God's love.

Repentance is the **fruit** of our love for God and for one another. In love, we regret our failings and amend our lives so that we might *live in love and*

hope and become more like God.

And while the tone of the Mass changes a bit during this season, we still gather to remember the life, death and resurrection of God Incarnate in the person of Jesus Christ for that is the promise of our Salvation.

So our hope is in nothing less than the forgiveness of God already made possibleby God Himself. Repentance, is grounded in hope.

(PAUSE)

In Advent we also look forward to the day when Jesus comes again, a time when we shall be gathered to Him. We sing "O Come, O Come Emmanuel" and we pray "Come Lord Jesus"

We are an Advent people, an Advent Church because not only in this special season but everyday, we are called:

- to remember that Jesus, out of love for us, came to be one with us,
- to anticipate the day Jesus will come again to gather us.....
- and to celebrate that Jesus is here among us in the present tense.....in the Eucharist as well as in all the Sacraments, in the Alleluias that we sing, in the Name Emmanuel - God With Us - that we invoke, and as always, in one another.

I am not so naive as to think that all of us live like this every day, all of the time. Faith and Hope and Joy are not an automatic feeling simply because we are Christian, but they **are** God's **promise** to us. Sometimes, we don't feel like Christ is present to us, or that He will come again. This is why the Church gives us a special time of year to concentrate, to focus on what we should be all of the time. It is a time to Re-form our hearts, a time to be

Re-newed in hope, a time to be Re-minded of our place in God's plan.

Nearly all of us have had the feeling of hopelessness, of despair. Perhaps that is where you are today. Something in your life is too difficult to bear and hope seems too distant to grasp. Perhaps more than ever, this is your Advent. Perhaps this is your time to ask God to show you, to give you hope.

I pray that the remainder of this season be fruitful, hopeful and holy, so that we can proclaim in truth to all-the-world the words of the Psalmist: **The Lord has done great things for us; we are filled with joy!**