

Second Sunday of Lent "C"
Dec. 10, 2006

A few weeks ago, I went on my annual retreat. I leave after our traditional Thanksgiving meal and head down the river to Manresa. Because Thanksgiving is a big family day, I have to prepare in advance to be able to leave on time. So, the night before I pack a bag, get together any reading material I might want to bring. I have to check the weather to see if I should pack for cold weather or warm weather. In short, I get everything together in advance. I prepare.

Every Friday night before an LSU home game, my son and his friends pack up the suburban with everything from flags, to TV's, to ice chests, to tables, well you get the picture. They head out at about 5 am to get their spot for tailgating.

In life we prepare for a lot of things, some are physical preparations and some are mental. For example, when I was in law school, we had to brief the cases for every class because you never knew when you would be called upon in class to explain a case. If you were not prepared, you lost a letter grade for the course. When I teach classes in evidence or sales or contracts, I tell my students that they should expect me to give a quiz on the homework material at every class. If they are not prepared, they will not pass the quiz. This falls into the category of mental preparation. Another kind of mental preparation is what athletes do before a big match or game. They get their game face on. It's mental preparation.

So, if we prepare for things physically and mentally, it would seem to follow that we should prepare for things spiritually. And that would seem to be particularly important now during this Christmas season, Advent. Look around town and you see people

preparing for Christmas. But how are they preparing? Our secular society has pretty much seen a shift in the focus of the season. No longer do the decorations contain the theme of Christmas being a celebration of the birth of Jesus. Instead of spiritual preparation, we are all wrapped up in physical preparation. Now, don't get me wrong, I think we can have both. But I look around and I think that we have to be reminded. Well, that is what the readings today are all about.

Jesus tells us in Scripture that he came to fulfill the promises made in the Old Testament. In the first reading, we have the prophet Baruch giving a description of the glory of Jerusalem. The only thing is that he and all of the Jews are in exile in Babylonia. Imagine a bunch of jihadists, coming into a house, killing the father of the house and taking the wife and kids away to make slaves of them. Well, that was the situation that the Jews were in when Baruch was writing. Does he write of doom and gloom? No, he writes that they will see their children who had been carried away by their enemies returning to Jerusalem in glory as on royal thrones. The people did not at that time expect something so wonderful, but the prophet tells them to expect it and to be prepared for it. Likewise, John the Baptist is delivering a similar message. Repent, be baptized. The lord is coming. Now he was not talking about baptism in the same sense that we know baptism, but it is important to note that he was calling the Jews to change, to move away from a position that is contrary to the will of God and to move closer to God. "Prepare the way of the Lord" not in a literal sense, but in a spiritual sense. He was telling them and he tells us today, get your self right with God now before he comes.

So, the theme today is spiritual preparation.

So, how do we do that?

I think that we do that by taking the time to slow down from our hurried lives and to re-focus on the things that are important to us. In Fr. Than's etc. in the bulletin, he mentions one of the seven habits of successful people. It is, "BEGIN WITH THE END IN MIND". Sometimes we forget why we do things. I know I do. So, if you are a student, it is important that every now and then you remind yourself what you are doing in school. Today we will give a special blessing to the graduates. They have made it to the end. But the end, graduation is not really the end. It is really the beginning. The reason to go to school is to prepare for life after school. Oh there's that word again, PREPARE! Sometimes also, we come to Mass and forget why we come. Do we come out of a sense of obligation or to strengthen our relationship with God?

I am a cradle Catholic, so I have heard these reading every third year for many, many years. It is easy to look at the theme as preparing ourselves for the coming of Jesus, or to look at it as preparation for the second coming. However, practically speaking, I think it is good to look at our every day lives and think of how much we prepare for. We prepare for work, we prepare for parties, we prepare for school, we prepare for supper, we prepare for travel, and we prepare our houses for the winter and our gardens for the summer and on and on. But what do we do to prepare ourselves?

I am a big believer in the principle of sowing and reaping. If you sow good seeds you will reap a good harvest. If you sow bad seeds you will sow a bad harvest. I look at nature and I see that if you plant corn, you get corn. You don't get rice or something

else. So it is with the seeds we sow in our lives. You ever notice that when you smile at a person or are friendly that almost all of the time the response is positive? And, if you are rude or nasty to a person the response to you is usually negative? I think this is the principle of sowing and reaping at work. Well, I think that the kind of seeds we sow in our lives depends on the spiritual preparation we do for living our lives. If we prepare for the day by beginning with prayer, we will be in a different place spiritually and mentally when we go out and face the world. Then when we see someone we can smile and be friendly instead of grumpy. If we begin the day in a hurried way, nervous about being late and anxious about things, then we are less likely to be that friendly person. The way you ensure that you sow good seeds is to make good spiritual preparation. I read once that if you want to have a good night sleep, then read something positive before you go to sleep. In fact the recommendation was to read for ten minutes before going to sleep every night. If you do that, the theory goes, you will rest better and wake up refreshed. You ever have a rough night sleeping after watching some very negative movie like a horror film or a suspense thriller? Well, that is this principle working. I have taken this theory and added a twist. I read prayers before bed. Nothing more positive to me than prayer, so I try to do it every night. And when I do, I find I sleep better. This is a combination of physical, mental and spiritual preparation.

So, when the readings tell us to prepare, we can listen, say it's a good idea and leave it in church when we leave, or we can take it to heart and incorporate it into our lives. The choice is ours. It is up to us. I only know this, if I can take the time to prepare for all the small things that are unimportant in the grand scheme of things, then I can take the time

to prepare me to be a better person. We are all called to be Christ in a troubled world. If we are going to answer the call, we better be prepared.