

2nd Sunday Advent- C

Baruch 5: 1-9; Philippians 1:4-6, 8-11; Luke 3: 1-6

Homilies are vehicles for breaking open the Word of God. First read the Sunday readings at: <http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/120912.cfm>

...the word of God came to John the son of Zechariah in the desert.

The word. This is the same word that we hear in Genesis when on the first, second, third, fourth, fifth and sixth days of creation, “...God said... And so it happened.” (Gen 1).

This is the same word that we hear in John’s Gospel:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came to be through him, and without him nothing came to be. (Jn 1: 1-3)

This is the same word that is breathed into us at conception and enlightens our hearts everyday.

This word is our call, our call to be that... for which we were made. This is our call to vocation. You will hear me pray often in encouragement of vocations. Most often you will hear me advocate for the vocation to the priesthood or religious life. I do so because it seems to me that in our current times our noisy environment often camouflages the quiet voice of God’s call to those whom he created to serve in that special way.

What is interesting to me, though, is that in my preparation I looked up the word, vocation, in my catechism’s index and was directed to paragraph 1. That’s right, the first paragraph of 2,865 paragraphs. (They’re all worth reading by the way.) It says,

God, infinitely perfect and blessed in himself, in a plan of sheer goodness freely created man to make him share in his own blessed life. For this reason, at every time and in every place, God draws close to man. He calls man to seek him, to know him, to love him with all his strength. He calls together all men, scattered and divided by sin, into the unity of his family, the Church. To accomplish this, when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son as Redeemer and Savior. In his Son and through him, he invites men to become, in the Holy Spirit, his adopted children and thus heirs of his blessed life.

God calls us and we respond. Tonight we worship at the vigil Mass of the second Sunday of Advent, but we do so basking in the light of today’s solemnity of the Immaculate Conception when at Mass we heard Mary respond:

Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord.

May it be done to me according to your word. (Lk 1:37)

May we respond as Mary and John respond so that “*all flesh shall see the salvation of God.*”

But salvation from what?

Lifeguards save swimmers. Fire fighters save babies. And SWAT teams save hostages.

My wife saved me from a life of meaningless relationships.

In today’s Gospel, John wants us to be saved, too. He is in the desert proclaiming a baptism of repentance. Repentance is not just a guilty feeling about something. It is more accurately understood as a reorientation of one’s thinking—a turning away from and a turning to. It is conversion. It is a fulfillment of the self that God created you to be.

John demonstrated this physically by immersion in water. This also is an immersion in the word of God. It is bathing in his grace, a turning from and a turning to.

John is preparing the way for that immersion. His ministry echoes the prophesy of Isaiah:

...make straight his paths. Every valley shall be filled and every mountain and hill shall be made low. The winding roads shall be made straight and the rough ways made smooth.

This is a pretty dramatic image. It is second coming apocalyptic stuff. My mountain experience has been with the Appalachians. They may be small by Rocky standards, but they still inspire awe for me. How could these winding ways be made straight? How could these hills be leveled to fill valleys?

But, we are challenged to comprehend a twisting of ways, heights of hills and lowliness of valleys that is more imposing than the Appalachians. I am talking about the twists and turns, the highs and lows of human hearts. The heart is more resistive to change than a mountain is to TNT.

What is going on in your heart that resists Jesus? If your life is a whirlwind of activity, when could you ever look at those places in your heart you’d rather be numb to?

John’s answer is immersion, a baptism of the heart. By bathing in the word of God, our twists and turn, lows and highs are made straight in preparation of God’s salvation. But saved for what?

A clue comes later on in our story with John the Baptist.

(Jesus) came up from the water and behold, the heavens were opened and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove coming upon him. And a voice came from the heavens saying, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased." (Mt 3:16-17).

In our immersion in the word, as our hearts are made straight and level, we are prepared to hear those very same words addressed to ourselves, "You are my beloved with whom I am well pleased."

God is burning with desire to say this to you. Will you allow him? Will you prepare your heart to hear him?

What is winding its way in your heart? What are the heights of obstacles to letting God in? What are the low places that you refuse to discard? These are what you are being saved from. Allow your baptism to turn you toward that voice in heaven calling you his child. Take advantage of the gift of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Allow God to help straighten out the twists and turns of your heart.

This Advent we celebrate Jesus' coming. He came to us in a stable 2000 years ago. We are watchful for his 2nd coming. We open our hearts to him today—in hearing the Word, in communion at this altar, and by embracing Jesus found in the people the Father sends to cross our paths.

From what are you being saved?

For whom are you being saved?