

2nd Sunday Advent- C 2009

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/nab/readings/120609.shtml>

You caught all those names, right? When you heard “Pontius Pilate” did your mind flash to Jesus’ trial? Who is Lysanias and where is Trachonitis! We have a whole National Geographic Channel thing happening here. And it all builds up to the climax of “*all flesh shall see the salvation of God.*”

Salvation...salvation from what?

My wife saved me from a life of meaningless relationships.

At Fr. Ken’s 25th anniversary celebration, one of his gal friends toasted (or roasted) him by saying that his ordination saved a woman from a lifetime of _____, well, you fill in the rest.

Go downtown in any major city and you’ll likely find at the mission a neon sign flashing, “Jesus Saves”.

Save me from what?

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

~~Who does Jesus save?~~

And in our Gospel today John is trying to save us, 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 self.

John demonstrated this physically by immersion in water. But this baptism 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 about 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, 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?

So what is winding its way in your heart? What are the heights of obstacles to letting God in. Where 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 confession. Allow God to help straighten out the twists and turns of your heart.

This Advent we celebrate Jesus' coming. He came into history 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 in the person next to us, in front of us and behind us.

From what are you being saved?

For whom are you being saved?