

Second Sunday of Advent

When we encounter road works, we often get a bit annoyed that we have to reduce our speed or wait for a while to give way to oncoming traffic. The roadwork on the Southeastern freeway seems to have gone on forever. But none of us complains once the road work is done and we can drive safely on a new stretch of road. We can forget how important the road makers are in our community

On this Second Sunday of Advent the good news is about a road maker called John, the son of Zechariah. John comes back to us each Advent about the same time as the little corellas come to visit us. Both make quite a noise, but the corellas stay much longer than John does. In a very dramatic way Luke zeros in on a moment of history when the Word of God came to this man John and made him into God's prophet. Luke tells us that it was in the fifteenth year of the reign of the emperor Tiberius, and Pontius Pilate, Herod Antipas, Philip and Lysanias were governing the lands around where this happened. Annas and Caiaphas were the High Priests in Jerusalem. All this information helps us to appreciate that this moment was a pivotal moment in the history of our world and that what John was called to say in God's name was a message for the whole world to hear.

All that detail can help us to understand that at each moment of our lives the Word of God comes to us too and calls us to live and to speak in the name of our God. In some way we are all prophets. We are moved by God to make God known by the way that we live in union with him. Pope Francis often talks about this. Speaking to the members of the Pauline Communities that were in Rome last week he encouraged them to embrace the means of modern communication as their "pulpit," so that "Jesus Christ might be proclaimed to the men and women of our time with the means available to our time." The Pope concluded his address by thanking the members of the Pauline Family for their dedication and for their constant prayer that "the holy people of God might be continually nourished by the Word of God." "Never forget prayer," he said. "It is the most important means of communication. If I speak to the whole world but not with the Lord, then it's best to go home."

John was called step out from the darkest night and to be the voice that cries in the wilderness, "Prepare a way for the Lord, make his paths straight. Every valley will be filled in, every mountain and hill laid low." That imagery comes from the idea of ancient peoples making roads for their king to travel upon. If they knew that the king was to come to them, they would get out their road making equipment and make sure that all the potholes

would be filled in and the rough parts made smooth. It is the sort of thing that we still do for royal visitors.

It is an image that we see used in our first reading today from Baruch. In the reading from Baruch God is the road maker. He makes the road so that the people of Israel can walk in safety under the glory of God. God will guide the people of Israel “in joy by the light of his glory with his mercy and integrity for escort”.

But once a road is made it can be used by people going in both directions. We usually think of ourselves travelling on a road to meet the Lord. But the Advent Road allows the Lord to travel to us, to come to us, to meet us where we are. And we don't have to do all the road building. Jesus invites us to let him make the road straighter and smoother for us. We probably don't have to do much more than admit that the Advent Road is in need of repair. Once we have admitted that there are some things in our lives that prevent the Lord from making his way to us easily, then the road works can begin. Once we have seen the things that need to be changed in our lives then the Lord is ready to work with us and make those changes.

Today's reading from St. Paul's letter to the Philippians can give us much encouragement. What he says to that community we can hear him saying to us. “I am quite

certain that the One who began this good work in you will see that it is finished when the Day of Christ Jesus comes. My prayer is that your love for each other may increase more and more and never stop improving your knowledge and deepening your perception so that you can always recognise what is best.”

Pope Francis has devoted his Wednesday Audiences to reflections on St. Joseph as we come to the end of the year of St. Joseph. Last week he concluded his reflections with a prayer. “Saint Joseph, you who guarded the bond with Mary and Jesus, help us to care for the relationships in our lives. May no one experience the sense of abandonment that comes from loneliness. Let each of us be reconciled with our own history, with those who have gone before, and recognise even in the mistakes made a way through which Providence has made its way, and evil did not have the last word. Show yourself to be a friend to those who struggle the most, and as you supported Mary and Jesus in difficult times, support us too on our journey. Amen.”

On this second Sunday of Advent perhaps we could ask Joseph to share something of the hope and expectation that he had as he made his journey with Mary towards Bethlehem. May we make Jesus welcome as Joseph did.