



Contributed by Fr. James M. Donohue, C.R.

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SECOND SUNDAY IN ADVENT—YEAR C
December 5, 2021

GATHERING TIME (10-15 Minutes)

Introduction to the Word:

I am a little embarrassed to admit this, but when I arrived in Tanzania in August 2019, I would daydream when I would go for a walk. The daydream usually involved returning "home." I would daydream about the flight, and about seeing my family and friends after a year, and about returning to my life as a teacher at the Mount. But something began to change by about December. By then, I had already been in Tanzania for four months and, instead of daydreaming about returning to my "old" home in North America, I started to feel sad about leaving my "new" home in Africa. I realized that some shift had taken place gradually and almost imperceptibly within me. I became much more conflicted as the joys of returning began to mix equally with the sadness of departure. Indeed, I had become comfortable with my situation.

I wonder if this is what the Israelites experienced in their exile in Babylon. Against their will, the first wave of exiles were taken to Babylon in 597 B.C., but they soon became accustomed and immersed within the Babylonian society. When King Cyrus of Persia conquered the Babylonians, and permitted the Jews to return to the Land of Israel, many resisted and were content to stay in Babylon. They preferred what they had gotten used to, and were not too eager to embark on some new journey back to the land of Israel.

The time of Advent is a time of preparation ... preparation for the new and wonderful things that God yearns to do within us. But, that means that we might have to let go of the "old" in order to embrace the "new". In Lk 5:37-39, Jesus talks about how new wine must be put into new

wineskins, but he warns that “no one who has been drinking old wine desires new, for he says, ‘The old is good.’” Here, Jesus is not talking about vintage, but about how hard it is to surrender what is comfortable and familiar for the promise of something new.

Warm-up Activity: *(about 8 to 10 Minutes)*

What “old” ways do I need to surrender during this Advent season?

What “new” things might God want to reveal to me during this Advent season?

What are my hopes for embracing the “new” and what are my fears for letting go of the “old?”

The Table of the Word

The Hope of Christ’s Coming

Liturgically, we look forward to the celebration of Christ’s coming to humanity in the Incarnation, where God becomes human. Advent is the time for us to prepare for this wonderful moment that we celebrate at Christmas. Advertising and merchandising are built upon happy memories and joyful moments with family and friends. But we know that not everyone has happy Christmas memories and not everyone will have joyful moments with family and friends. In the preparation for Christmas, we should also remember those to whom Jesus directed his attention: to those who had little, to those who were ignored, to those who were marginalized. Some of our Advent preparation should include some activity where we are attentive to the poor, the sick, and the vulnerable. In doing so, we hope to hear the words of Jesus, “When you did this to the least of my brothers and sisters, you did it for me.” Perhaps this type of activity will prepare us best for Christ’s arrival.

Penitential Rite:

Leader: Make the winding road straight, and the rough way smooth for our God.

Lord Jesus, Sun of justice and Prince of peace,

Christ Jesus, Joy for sinners and Light for our darkness,

Lord Jesus, Hope of prophets in every age,

Lord have mercy.

Christ have mercy.

Lord have mercy.

Let us pray (together):

*In this year of Grace, in this and every place, O God everlasting,
Your Word resounds in the wilderness of Advent, calling us to stand upon the heights
and behold the splendour of your beauty.*

Fill in the valleys of our neglect; bring low our mountains of self-centredness.

Prepare in our hearts your way of righteousness and peace.

*Let our love become a harvest of goodness, which you will bring to completion for the day of
Christ Jesus, who was, who is, and who is to come, your Son who lives and reigns with you
in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God for ever.*

Amen.

SCRIPTURE REFLECTION TIME (45 minutes)

*(As Christians we believe that the **WORD** of God we hear proclaimed each Sunday is an empowering Word, and that God is present in the Word proclaimed. This is the Word that God wants us to hear today. The dynamic of the Small Christian Community, namely, reflecting on our life story within the context of this Word, and sharing the insights of these reflections, is such that God's Spirit becomes present, and the gifts of the Spirit are experienced as empowering and life-giving.)*

FIRST READING (Baruch 5:1-9)

Take off the garment of your sorrow and affliction, O Jerusalem, and put on forever the beauty of the glory from God. Put on the robe of the righteousness that comes from God; put on your head the diadem of the glory of the Everlasting; for God will show your splendor everywhere under heaven. For God will give you evermore the name, "Righteous Peace, Godly Glory." Arise, O Jerusalem, stand upon the height; look toward the east, and see your children gathered from west and east at the word of the Holy One, rejoicing that God has remembered them. For they went out from you on foot, led away by their enemies; but God will bring them back to you, carried in glory, as on a royal throne.

For God has ordered that every high mountain and the everlasting hills be made low, and the valleys filled up, to make level ground, so that Israel may walk safely in the glory of God. The woods and every fragrant tree have shaded Israel at God's command. For God will lead Israel with joy, in the light of his glory, with the mercy and righteousness that come from him. The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

SECOND READING (Philippians 1:4-6, 8-11)

Brothers and Sisters, I pray always with joy in my every prayer for all of you, because of your partnership for the gospel from the first day until now. I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work in you will continue to complete it until the day of Christ Jesus. God is my witness, how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus.

And this is my prayer: that your love may increase ever more and more in knowledge and every kind of perception, to discern what is of value, so that you may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God.

The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

GOSPEL (Luke 3:1-6)

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke. **Glory to you, O Lord.**

In the fifteenth year of the reign of Emperor Tiberius, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was ruler of Galilee, and his brother Philip ruler of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias ruler of Abilene, during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John the Baptist, son of Zechariah in the wilderness.

He went into all the region around the Jordan River, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, as it is written in the book of the words of the Prophet Isaiah, "The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth; and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.'"

The Gospel of the Lord. **Praise to you Lord Jesus Christ.**

Lectio Divina means "sacred prayer through sacred reading." It was a popular form of prayer in the early Church. This Word proclaimed today is God's own Word, God's way of speaking to you today through God's own Spirit. So take a few moments to be quiet, allowing this Word you have just heard to touch you or soak into you as you reflect quietly on the three readings. Is there a word or thought that somehow attracts you or has your interest? If so, simply identify it and describe it in a few words.

COMMENTARY

First Reading: One of the greatest disasters in the history of Israel was the conquest and deportation of the inhabitants of Jerusalem and its surrounding areas by the Babylonians in 597 and 586 B.C. The people of Israel ended up being in exile in Babylon for about 70 years before they eventually returned home. Our first reading from the prophet Baruch is meant to give hope. Through the prophet, God announces that a way will be prepared for the people of Israel to return to Jerusalem: a straight way will be made through the wilderness, valleys will be filled in, mountains and hills will be made low, rugged land will be leveled, and rough country will be altered into a broad valley. As the people of Israel look to the future, they now look with hope that God will take care of them, gathering them and leading them home.

Second Reading: Perhaps Paul's prayer in the Letter to the Philippians should be posted on each of our refrigerators or some other place of prominence in our homes for reference during the Advent and Christmas season. In the midst of the avalanche of advertising about what to buy, what to wear, how to look, perhaps this prayer will keep us in balance: "...that our love may increase ever more and more in knowledge and every kind of perception, to discern what is of value."

Gospel Reading: Our gospel focuses upon John the Baptist who is preparing the way for Jesus. John uses images from the prophets during the time of the Exile, such as Baruch and Isaiah, to encourage people to prepare a way for the coming of the Messiah. Just as Israel needed to trust that God would prepare a way for them to return from Babylon to Jerusalem, so now Israel must trust that God will prepare a way for people to turn from their old ways of sin in order to accept the new life offered in Christ. This new life is often characterized by Jesus as a new way of relating to God and to one another. Jesus reveals that God is our Father and that we are brothers and sisters. The old ways of hostility and competition give way to the new ways of forgiveness and generosity. The last verse of the last book of the Old Testament points to the sign of these new relationships: "He will turn the heart of fathers to their sons, and the heart of sons to their fathers" (Malachi 3:24). In the face of the possibilities of these new relationships, we realize that we often cling to our old ways out of stubbornness of heart. But, like the father of the Prodigal Son, Jesus never gives up on us, yearning that, with His grace working within us, He will bring about the good things that He longs to do for us and with us.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion:

1. "...Put on forever the beauty of the glory from God" (Baruch 5:1).

This rarely-heard prophet shares with us his vision of "the Glory from God." His is a God who knows no limits in terms of caring or forgiving. Baruch challenges us to dream freely and boldly

about the possibilities of our lives, knowing that we are supported always by a God without limits.

- a) In your younger years, what youthful dreams did you have in regard to the future?
- b) Which of these have been actualized? Which are still alive but barely?
- c) What are your dreams *today*? Or have you stopped dreaming? And if so, why?

2. "This is my prayer" (Phil 1:9).

Paul reveals here a genuine and ongoing love for those people of Philippi; he loved them so much that they were the only Pauline converts from whom Paul took money for his ministry/mission. The end of the reading, however, suggests that they are not yet perfect and still need more Christian development and growth ("that you may be pure and blameless"). Sometimes we have difficulties with some people who are not yet perfectly formed. The love of which Paul speaks is selfless; it is open to all people, like the sacrificial love of Christ.

- a) What limits, for example, do you put on your acceptance of others?
- b) Is it difficult for you to befriend someone with whom you have major value differences?
- c) In what way is our global Church community having difficulty practicing Paul's exhortation?

3. "Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight" (Lk 3:4).

We are beginning the season and cycle of Luke. Luke tells us that anyone willing to walk in the way of the Lord is invited to come on the journey. As pilgrims on the 'Way' of the Lord, we encounter many different kinds of people who share our journey,

- a) Consider how the media (television, movies, magazines, newspapers, and the Internet) are impacting in significant ways the attitudes we have towards the possibilities for justice and peace in the world. Is this helping the cause or hurting it?
- b) What evidence do you see personally that there are signs of hope in response to all the negative stuff? How can you, personally and as a small group, be a sign of hope in your parish community? In your home? In the workplace? For the world?
- c) Talk about your own experience as a small group, meeting weekly for a period of time. Do you sense that your weekly gatherings around the Word have helped you in some way to respond to the invitations of today's readings? Share, as best you can, some new insights you have as these relate to your growth in faith.

CARING-PRAYING TIME: (15-20 minutes)

1. Word for the Week: "To you I lift up my soul, O Lord, my God" (Ps 25:1, 20).

2. Suggestion for the Week: Who might I reach out to in prayer and action during this Advent week? What hope might I bring to another who is alone, hurting, discouraged, or "imprisoned?"

3. Intercessions: (Response: **Lord, hear our prayer**)

Leader: Praying with constant joy and filled with the compassion of Christ Jesus, let us offer intercessions on behalf of all.

That the Church may be a voice crying out in the wilderness to ‘prepare the way of the Lord’, we pray ...

That those who govern nations may plant seeds of peace for a harvest of righteousness, we pray...

That those exiled from their homes by violence and terror may soon exchange the garments of sorrow for robes of rejoicing, we pray ...

That the catechumens among us may persevere in their journey toward the forgiveness of sins and a birth to new life, we pray ...

That our beloved dead may be found pure and blameless in the day of Christ, we pray ...

That Jews, Muslims and Christians all over the world, **mindful of a common Father God** and a common ancestor in faith, Abraham, may not give up on their quest for justice and peace, but may find ways to live life together with mutual acceptance, forgiveness and love, we pray...

That all those suffering the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic may be given all the help they need, we pray...

For Pope Francis’ monthly intention: that catechists, summoned to announce the Word of God, may be witnesses to the Word, with courage and creativity and in the power of the Holy Spirit, we pray...

Let us pray

*God of everlasting glory and eternal love, from west and east
You gather the humble, leading them with joy to the glorious light of your kingdom.
Make straight Your path in our hearts; bring low the heights of our pride;
and prepare us to celebrate with ardent faith the coming of our Saviour,
Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you
in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God forever. Amen.*

With hands and hearts united in gratitude for God's favours today, we pray that all those in our influence be moved to be open to your Word and your Spirit, while we pray as one, OUR FATHER ...

Celebrating the Word, Resurrection Ministries of the Congregation of the Resurrection Ontario-Kentucky Province (including the former Resurrection Centre), 265 Westmount Road North, Waterloo, Ontario, Canada N2L 3G7. (Celebrating the Word was founded by Father Frank Ruetz, C.R. deceased 2012). For information: [website: www.resurrectionists.ca](http://www.resurrectionists.ca). Email: provincialoffice@resurrectioncollege.ca The Scripture version used in this commentary is the New Revised Standard Version (copyrighted by the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA).