

Second Sunday in Advent

The Coming of Our God

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In this season of Advent we await the coming of Christ. We begin somewhat in the position of the Jews in today's first reading and responsorial psalm; we begin in exile, distant, alienated even estranged from our God. For in our self-centeredness we create chasms between one another. In our pride we place ourselves high above others and in our fear we build walls to defend ourselves from each other. But as Baruch proclaims to the Jews in Babylon, our God is coming to fill the depths and the gorges that divide us. Our God is coming to lay low the lofty mountains that isolate us. Our God is making a path straight and level for us to return home.

John proclaims the same words but with a different twist. For John it is our task to fill the valleys and level the mountains lying between us and God. For John it is our task to turn away from our sin, to break out of our self-centeredness, and to return to God. It reminds me of a story told by a Jesuit friend of mine who always sprinkles little stories into his homilies. This one is about a kid whose teacher had assigned him to write a letter to God. He wrote "Dear God, I am doing the best I can. Frankie."

Surely both are true. God approaches us as we approach God. For our separation from God is not a literal distance between us, but a function of our own blindness to God's presence, our own deafness to his soft calling in the quiet of our hearts. God can be difficult to see and hard to hear, not because he is so far removed from us, but because he is so close, so familiar that we come to take his presence for granted. How could we live even a moment without God's creative power sustaining us in existence? How could we love even the best of people without God's grace to open our hearts?

It reminds me of an old Rabbi's tale, which I have told before. A wise old Rabbi is having dinner with a new family from his synagogue. At table the Rabbi turns the youngest little boy and says to him, "I will give you a gold coin if you can tell me where God is." Without missing a beat, the boy turns to the Rabbi and replies, "And I will give you two gold coins if you can tell me where God is not!"

This Advent may we come to see the world again through the wondrous eyes of child. May we lower our defenses and shed our pride to open our hearts to the presence of God all around us.

“I am sure of this much,” writes Paul, “that he who has begun the good work in you will carry it through to completion.” As the days darken this Advent season may we light a candle and put it in the window-sill of our hearts to welcome indoors family and friend, neighbor and stranger. Sin may indeed abound, but grace ever super-abounds casting a light that scatters the looming darkness.

May our own faith in God, and our hope in one another cause our love to abound more and more that the Word of God might take flesh once more in our hearts this Christmas.