

9th December 2018 (Second Sunday in Advent, Year C)

Baruch 5:1-9; Psalm 125(126); Philippians 1:4-6,8-11; Luke 3:1-6.

Prepare a way for the Lord!

Christmas is a beautiful time when we remember the birth of Jesus Christ in Bethlehem, over two thousand years ago. This is the moment when after a long time of preparation, as witnessed in the Old Testament, God himself was born among us, as one of us, in order to be able to speak to us in a language we could understand. In some ways, the season of Advent that precedes the liturgical celebration of Christmas is a re-living of the long wait of the People of God.

The first Christians believed that since God's plan had reached its fulfilment with the birth of the Messiah, then the universe had achieved what it had been created for, and the 'second coming' followed by the end of the world as we know it, was going to be close. Christians were encouraged to prepare themselves to be ready for this 'second coming.' Today we know that the 'second coming' was not as soon as the first Christians believed it to be; we are still enjoying God's creation two thousand years later. Moreover we do not know exactly what is meant by the 'second coming;' in the gospels it is described as a triumphant return of Christ. What we do know for sure is that at some stage in our own life, we will all meet our God face to face, and we need to prepare ourselves for that great moment in our existence. In today's second reading, Paul prays for the Church in Philippi, and for all the Church, that we will be ready for this our meeting with God. Paul tells us that charity, love towards one another, prepares us for this day of our great encounter.

In the gospel reading, Luke goes through a list of historical details before telling us that the word of God came to John the Baptist in the wilderness. Luke names the reigning Roman emperor, the governor, the local Jewish rulers and the high priest; the word of God comes to John at a definite time and place. Just as in Jesus, God took on everything that was human and lived a life like us, so also in our own life; God's word comes to us in the reality of our life. We are not expected to be doing anything different or special in order to encounter God; rather we meet him and interact with him every day while carrying out our daily duties. This 'third' coming of God in our midst is just as important as the first two and prepares us for our final meeting with God.

We prepare ourselves for Christ's 'second coming' by actively participating in his 'third' coming in our daily lives. As we get used to listening to God's word in our life and as we learn to see the face of God around us every day, we prepare ourselves to meet God face to face! If we learn to recognise God in this life, it will then be very easy for us to stand in front of him on the last day.

For Luke this preparation needs to be radical. Taking his imagery from the ancient world where emperors built straight and wide roads in order to access each corner of their vast empires with ease and haste, Luke invites us to build similar roads for God in our life. These roads need to be straight and smooth, flattening or tunnelling through mountains and hills, and filling in valleys or building bridges over them so that nothing could stand in the way. Our meeting with Christ is paramount.

Our annual celebration of Advent invites us to 'stay awake' and 'be prepared' for this great coming. The giving of gifts at Christmas and the sharing of greetings with family and friends, reminds us of the need to reach out to those in need around us. God's word is a message of love inviting us to look beyond the limits of our daily life. Who and where is God in our life today? How can we be the presence of God in other people's lives?

Let us continue preparing for the great coming of God in our midst.

Fr Mario