

Advent C-2
2018

I did a day trip to Albany last week – driving the turnpike and thruway. Whenever I travel the interstate highway system I marvel at what an engineering feat it is. I see roads carved through mountains, hills leveled, valleys filled in - all so we have a straight and smooth ride. Even the toll barriers have been leveled!

We hear a message echoed in two readings today: first, the gospel of Luke.
“Make ready the way of our God, clear a straight path.
Every valley will be filled and every mountain and hill will be leveled.
Twisted paths will be made straight and the rough way smooth-
And all will see the salvation of God.”

And the prophet Baruch: “For God has commanded that every lofty mountain be made low and that age-old depths and gorges be filled to level ground...and you, Jerusalem, go up to the heights and look to the east to see your children gathered from the east and the west, rejoicing that they are remembered by God. “

Our ancestors in the faith believed in the power of God to clear a path – so those in exile to return home, and those awaiting the Messiah would have hope. And to reassure the people, God gives a word that God is not only the God of might who moves mountains, but is also with us in our very midst.

We hear the word of God coming to John in the desert; and the evangelist is very clear about situating this in time and place: into this place and at that time the word of God breaks into history. The word spoken with perfect love becomes one of us and one with us, Emmanuel.

For me this is the most contemplative of seasons – ironically we lament it easily gets swept up in the mad dash to Christmas. I believe we are *all* contemplatives; by nature we are thoughtful, questioning, searching, wondering persons.

Thomas Merton, concluded that his monastic (and the call of all believers) is to discover “the true significance of my life and my right place in God’s creation.” I believe that all our fervent hopes and deepest longings come down to our longing for God, the Holy One, the Divine.

Significantly the Advent message, a liberating, redeeming, saving Word is proclaimed first in the desert– the barren wilderness of no attractions and no distractions.

It is in the wilderness where God waits for us. God meets us in the silence and darkness of this season. God looks for us on the tangled path, waits for us as we struggle to level the mountain, as we walk the rough road. To prepare a way for our God requires that we slow down, stop, be attentive, listen, watch, pray, dream, wait.

Like for John, the wilderness is the place we find our truth. Advent opens us up to that inner space where we may deeply encounter life, its challenges, its losses, its blessings, and specifically this season, its promise.

One thing we should not feel during this season is guilt.

Thomas Keating – another monk and contemplative – developed a practice called “centering prayer – which everyone can do – a prayer that resides in the heart. For anyone who falls short in their search for their right place in God’s creation, he offers this: “Any effort to know God is a success, even though we feel it is a flop, because God appreciates even the smallest consideration or thought much more than we can imagine.” St. Paul puts it this way: the good work that God begins in us God will bring to perfection.

During this season the Church prays its “O antiphons” – come O Wisdom from on high, Come O Lord of might, Come O Rod of Jesse, Come O Key of David and so forth.

My favorite one is this: Come O Radiant Dawn! Advent and its practices originated in the northern hemisphere. The Advent purple, a bit brighter than the darker penitential violet of Lent, is meant to reflect the color of the morning sky at dawn this time of year. To me this image of the Radiant Dawn inspires so much hope and promise. We can pray it often during this season, for the dawn connects to our hopes and longings, and the coming of the radiant One, Emmanuel, God-with-us.