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4 December 2022

Second Sunday of Advent

Reflection by Angela Marquis

Introduction

The Second Sunday of Advent inspires us to repentance. A simple act of contrition is not enough, however, for we must go and sin no more (John 8:11). Only through active forgiveness, where we purposefully change the direction of our lives toward God, can we be fully present to the gift before us—the loving gift of life.

Penitential Act

The Advent Wreath Responsory (see 'Advent Wreath Year A) often replaces the Penitential Act and therefore leads into the Opening Prayer.

Or, use one of the *Roman Missal* texts or this optional litany form:

Lord Jesus, you are the Lamb of God. Lord have mercy.

You draw us into the reign of God. Christ have mercy.

You are the one who is to come. Lord have mercy.

Collect

The oration

Almighty and merciful God,
may no earthly undertaking hinder those
who set out in haste to meet your Son,
but may our learning of heavenly wisdom
gain us admittance to his company.

Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
God, for ever and ever.

The backdrop of this oration is the second coming of the Christ. The sense of 'haste' conveys willingness and desire rather than being caught short and unprepared.

Indeed, the prayer is all about our preparation. The oration sets in play earthly undertakings, heavenly wisdoms and admittance to Christ's company. This is not a dull contrast between earth and heaven. Rather, heavenly wisdom is the wisdom of Christ. The term conjures up the sapiential books of the Old Testament, which have much sagacious, practical and earthy advice. In New Testament terms, to be erudite in heavenly wisdom is to know the beatitudes. And to be learned in the ways of Christ is to be steeped in the knowledge that whatever we do for the least we are doing to Christ. When we clothe the poor and feed the hungry, we are in the company of Christ. The 'mundane' and 'earthly' are the things that hold us back from this encounter with Christ on earth.

And so, the prayer unfolds. In the Christian wisdom of care for the poor and the recognition of Christ in all, we are already in his company and experience his mercy. This learning fuels our desire, our haste, to be in his company fully and knowing the power of divine mercy.

Acknowledgement

The discussion of the collect, slightly adapted, was composed by Gerard Moore for the Canadian liturgical journal *Celebrate!* (Novalis Press). Our thanks to them for permission to reuse the material.

First Reading

Isaiah 11:1-10

Isaiah's text foretells the day of the Lord, a prophesy of the Messiah. When this day comes, violence will come to an end and all creation will live in harmony.

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 71:1-2. 7-8. 12-13. 17. R. cf. v.7

Justice shall flourish in his time, and fullness of peace for ever.

The psalmist implores God for a king who is just and righteous, one who will rule with integrity and peace, with compassion for the poor and vulnerable.

Second Reading

Romans 15:4-9

Paul exhorts his readers to recall the many faithful people of the scriptures who were helped by God. He urges his followers to never give up and to treat all with respect.

Gospel Reading

Matthew 3:1-12

John the Baptist is the fulfilment of Isaiah's prophesy of a voice in the wilderness will cry out to all, calling the world to repent in preparation for the coming of the Lord.

Reflection

This Gospel has everything! Prophecy, burning fires, cleansing waters, apocalyptic drama, repentance, baptism, even the possibility of Abraham's children being raised from stones! In 2022, we celebrate John the Baptist as the forerunner to Christ, the prophet, the one who makes straight the paths for the one who is to follow, all the while rejoicing at his message. The voice that cried out from the wilderness 2000 years ago, however, may not have been welcomed in the same way that he is for us today.

A mosaic of John the Baptist can be found in the Hagia Sophia Grand Mosque, Istanbul, Turkey. It depicts a sad man, eyes cast down and the weight of the world upon his shoulders. His hair is wild, his beard unkempt and he slumps forward with grief, sorrow or despair. Might this image depict John waiting, alone in his cell, for any word or news of Jesus? Has he perhaps just received his death sentence from Herod? Could it, in fact, illustrate John in the wilderness, deep in prayer, as he foresees the mystery of God to come. Whatever this exquisite artwork recalls for the person in contemplation, the feeling of desolation is palpable. The loneliness of one called to receive God's Word and prophesy to the world, while paying the ultimate price for choosing to say 'yes.'

Elizabeth and Zechariah name their baby John (Yohanan in Hebrew), meaning *graced by God* or God is gracious. Born to aged parents, John understands from an early age that his birth was considered by many to be both a gift and a miracle from God. Given their age, it is likely that John lost both parents while he was still young, however their experiences are recorded in Luke. John jumps within Elizabeth's 'barren' womb at the sound of Mary's 'virginal' voice—even before he is born, he knows and expects the Messiah. Elizabeth proclaims to Mary, 'Blessed is she who has believed' (Luke 1:45), perhaps comparing her cousin's faith with that of her doubting husband who was struck mute at his own annunciation (Luke 1:18). Zechariah redeems himself by naming his son John (1:63) as instructed by the angel Gabriel, and goes on to pronounce John 'a prophet of the Most High' (1:76), the one who will go before the Lord to prepare his way. John's very life is miraculous, and he fulfils both his father's and Isaiah's prophecies.

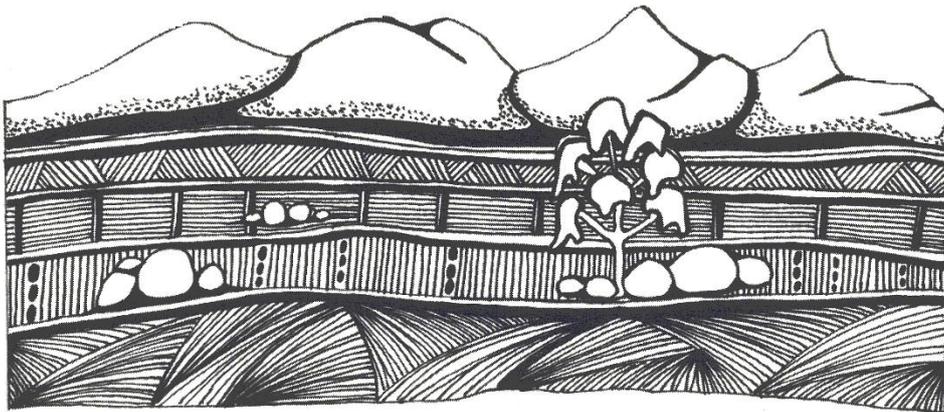
That 'nothing is impossible for God' is thematic of the Gospels – water transformed into wine, the feeding of thousands with a few loaves and a couple of fish, the paralysed who walk again. While John's claim that God can 'raise children for Abraham from these stones' (v.9) may simply be a dismissive comment highlighting the arrogance of the Pharisees and Sadducees who believe their place in the kingdom is assured, the claim that God can bring forth life where none was expected is symbolic of a new way of thinking and being. Children born from stones, the barren, or the virginal, may sound impossible, yet these ideas lie at the heart of repentance and are crucial to conversion.

When we are children, we are taught to say sorry when we hurt one another, do wrong, take something that doesn't belong to us, or refuse to share. The first few times we do these things we may be gently chided, however if we continue to exhibit

these behaviours, adults become less accepting. We are expected not simply to say sorry but to actually change our behaviour. Actions come from our hearts—it matters less what we say, rather it is what we *do* that is important. The son who tells his father he will not go and work in the field but eventually thinks better of it and goes, is far more at rights than the one who tells his father he will go, then doesn't (Matt. 21:28-31). John the Baptist's call to repentance and conversion of heart is not easy to hear. It requires us to change our hearts and minds, to cease our judgement of others and, as Paul instructs the Romans, to be tolerant of each other. Many are called to repentance, yet few will be chosen (Matt. 22:14).

John prophesies the power of the one who will follow him—not one born of priestly stock, into wealth, prestige, influence and authority, but one who will dine with outcasts and sinners, who will touch the unclean, bless those considered worthless, and ultimately give his life for those who persecute him. Jesus is the shoot who 'springs from the stock of Jesse' (Isa. 11:1), whose breath is 'the fear of the Lord' (11:3). All nations will bless him, cries the psalmist, for he will rule with justice (71:17). A new order is coming, claims Isaiah, one that disrupts the current power structures of the world and allows the forsaken to flourish. The hunter will lie in peace with its prey, the meek and the mighty are as one. God listens to the cries of the poor and marginalised—they instead will be lifted on high.

John preaches a kingdom 'close at hand' (Matt. 3:2), the promise of a saving God who works miracles, yet also one who will divide the wheat from the chaff. This God, who will bring life forth from the virgin, the barren and even the stones, will lay the axe to those trees that bear no fruit. This paradox cannot be lost upon us for it calls us to reconsider our own lives. Do we produce fruit? Are our actions lifegiving? Do we, like the Pharisees believe we have been chosen? Do we consider our place in society indicative of our place in heaven? According to John, the kingdom of heaven is not a birthright. We should not expect a place of honour simply because of our heritage, and certainly not because of what we say and believe. We are called to repentance, to a faith that moves mountains. *Nothing* is impossible for God.



Make straight the paths of the Lord.

Prayer of the Faithful

Introduction

As we gather today to celebrate in Word and Sacrament, let us pray to God for the needs of the world and our community.

Petitions

We pray for all Church leaders, especially Pope Francis, that they may always be filled with the Holy Spirit who enabled Christ your Son to be born to the world. May the Church's desire for synodality, led by Pope Francis, be fulfilled.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for the leaders of the world that in their immense responsibility and power they may be protected from the temptations that urge them to strive for selfish ambitions that lead to war, famine and recession.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for all people who are stricken with difficulty and suffering, especially for those who are enslaved by addictions, that they may humbly seek help.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for the local community that we may love one another and be united in mind and voice to give glory to God.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for ourselves that in this time of preparation for Christmas we will not be seduced by our wants but attend generously to the needs of others.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

Conclusion

Father, in your promise of peace and salvation, hear our petitions and grant them according to your will. We make our prayer through the Spirit and in the name of Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Music selections by Alessio Loiacono and Chris deSilva

| Title | AOV1 | AOVK | GA | CWB | CWBII | S&S2 |
|------------------------------------|------|------|-----|-----|-------|------|
| Behold, a rose e'er blooming | | | | | 258 | |
| Come, O Jesus, come, O Lord | | | | 658 | | |
| Come O long expected Jesus | | | | 657 | 232 | |
| Hark, a herald voice is sounding | | | | | 239 | |
| Like a shepherd | | | | | 538 | |
| O come, O come, Emmanuel | 174 | | 285 | 763 | 242 | |
| O Emmanuel | | 52 | | | 241 | |
| On Jordan's bank the Baptist's cry | | | | 780 | 244 | |
| Prepare the way | | | 284 | 794 | 250 | |
| Prepare the way, O Zion | | | | | 245 | |
| Ready the way | | | | | | 293 |
| The voice of God | | | 476 | 835 | 621 | |
| Wait for the Lord | | | 283 | | 251 | |
| Wake, awake for night is flying | | | 282 | 853 | 252 | |
| We shall prepare | | | | | | 294 |

Psalms Selected by Chris deSilva and Angela McCarthy

Psalm 71: *Justice shall flourish in his time, and fullness of peace for ever.*

| | CWB | JOBA | LPA |
|----------|-----|--------|--------|
| Psalm 71 | 175 | pg. 10 | pg. 10 |

Music selections by Michael Mangan

Fill every valley (TT/SYJ) [Gathering, Recessional]

O Emmanuel (TT/SYJ/CWBII) [Gathering, Communion, Recessional]

Come, Lord Jesus, come CH & V2 (SYJ/CWBII) [Lighting Advent Wreath]

To you, O Lord (LCC) *Ps 24/25 (Chn's Lectionary)* [Seasonal Psalm]

Advent alleluia (Vs 2) (TT) [Gospel Acclamation]

We come, we come (TWB) [Communion – esp V3]

Waiting for the child (TT/SYJ) [Non-Scriptural Reflection]