

## Second Sunday of Advent

Men's Fellowship December 5, 2021

### Prayer for Reading 1

Awaken us. Help us shed our clothes of mourning. Help us shake off our misery. Show your splendor in glorious robes. Give us a new name, O Jesus. Please give us your name, Peace.

### Reading I: [Bar 5:1-9](#)

Jerusalem, take off your robe of mourning and misery; put on the splendor of glory from God forever: wrapped in the cloak of justice from God, bear on your head the mitre that displays the glory of the eternal name. For God will show all the earth your splendor: you will be named by God forever the peace of justice, the glory of God's worship. Up, Jerusalem! stand upon the heights; look to the east and see your children gathered from the east and the west at the word of the Holy One, rejoicing that they are remembered by God. Led away on foot by their enemies they left you: but God will bring them back to you borne aloft in glory as on royal thrones. For God has commanded that every lofty mountain be made low, and that the age-old depths and gorges be filled to level ground, that Israel may advance secure in the glory of God. The forests and every fragrant kind of tree have overshadowed Israel at God's command; for God is leading Israel in joy by the light of his glory, with his mercy and justice for company.

### Responsorial Psalm: [Ps 126:1-2, 2-3, 4-5, 6.](#)

**R. (3) The Lord has done great things for us; we are filled with joy.**

When the LORD brought back the captives of Zion, we were like men dreaming. Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with rejoicing.

**R. The Lord has done great things for us; we are filled with joy.**

Then they said among the nations, "The LORD has done great things for them." The LORD has done great things for us; we are glad indeed.

**R. The Lord has done great things for us; we are filled with joy.**

Restore our fortunes, O LORD, like the torrents in the southern desert. Those who sow in tears shall reap rejoicing.

**R. The Lord has done great things for us; we are filled with joy.**

Although they go forth weeping, carrying the seed to be sown, They shall come back rejoicing, carrying their sheaves.

**R. The Lord has done great things for us; we are filled with joy.**

### Questions for Reading 1

1. "Led away on foot by their enemies ..." Led or chased are we experiencing this today as well as in the time of Baruch? Where is the hope for the refugee suffering in exile today? Can you

help God lower “the lofty mountains” or “fill the depths and gorges” for them in any way?  
How?

2. God gave Jerusalem the name “the peace of justice, the glory of God’s worship.” How does this name fit the Church today? If poorly, what would you do to make it fit? What would you like God to name your parish, your community, you?

### **Prayer for Reading 2**

Our Father, you know our needs. So please, give us, this day, every kind of wisdom and knowledge, discernment, and love. Please, we ask you, continue to complete the good work you began in us until the day of the coming of Christ Jesus.

### **Reading II:**        [Phil 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.

### **Questions for Reading 2**

1. As you remain on the path or The Way, St. Paul says, “then the one who began a good work in you will complete it.” Who is the instigator of the good work in you? Whom do you trust, yourself or God to complete your good works?
2. “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.” How might the synod Pope Francis called help the Church discern what is of value? Can the synod be God “beginning a good work” in the whole Church right now?

[God’s] word summons us to discernment and it brings light to that process. It guides the Synod, preventing it from becoming a Church convention, a study group or a political gathering, a parliament, but rather a grace-filled event, a process of healing guided by the Spirit. In these days, Jesus calls us, as he did the rich man in the Gospel, to empty ourselves, to free ourselves from all that is worldly, including our inward-looking and outworn pastoral models; and to ask ourselves what it is that God wants to say to us in this time. And the direction in which he wants to lead us.

## Opening of the Synodal Path

October 10, 2021

### **Prayer for Gospel**

In our chaos, Lord, oh, let us hear once again the Baptist crying out to us. "Prepare the way, make straight the paths. Every valley filled and hills made low.

All flesh shall see the salvation of God." God of constant newness, carve fresh roads into our wilderness: into climate and racial emergency. Let our whole life point to Jesus. He is born here, is with us now. Jesus, please turn our deserts into gardens.

### **Gospel:**            [Lk 3:1-6](#)

In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias was tetrarch of Abilene, during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John the son of Zechariah in the desert. John went throughout the whole region of the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, as it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah:

*A voice of one crying out in the desert:*

*"Prepare the way of the Lord,  
make straight his paths.*

*Every valley shall be filled  
and every mountain and hill shall be made low.*

*The winding roads shall be made straight,  
and the rough ways made smooth,  
and all flesh shall see the salvation of God."*

### **Questions for Gospel**

1. Why does Luke name the historical references in the beginning of this Gospel reading? Does it help you to locate John the Baptist in history books?
2. "All flesh shall see the salvation of God"? What are the implications for humanity in this saying? Is the entire world included in this plan? What are the implications for you? Do you watch all year round for God's coming? What are some of the ways God comes to you everyday?

***In Exile by Ron Rolheiser***

**Advent—Preparing for the Sublime**

Robert Waller published a book that became a runaway bestseller and an immensely popular movie. Entitled, [\*The Bridges of Madison County\*](#), it stirred the romantic imagination in a way that few other stories have in recent times, especially as it was played out in its film version by Clint Eastwood and Meryl Streep. The story runs this way:

A photographer for National Geographic magazine is sent out to photograph a series of old bridges in Madison county. Lost, he stops at a farmhouse to ask for directions. As chance would have it, the man of the house has just left for a cattle show. His wife is home alone and she and the photographer instantly sense a deep connection and fall violently in love. Karma, soulmates, mysticism, whatever, they experience a rare and powerful affinity. Within hours they are in bed with each other, triggering a love-affair that leaves them both sacramentally scarred for the rest of their lives.

What the viewer of the movie or reader of this book is asked to believe is that something truly sublime has taken place, a masterpiece of love has been painted, and a noble thing worth more than life itself has just occurred. But can this be so? Can anyone paint a masterpiece in a couple of hours? Can a doctoral thesis be completed in two hours? Can sex with someone you met just two hours before be sublime?

To answer those questions, I suggest you watch another film which, ironically, was playing in theatres at nearly the same time. It's a version of Jane Austin's [\*Sense and Sensibility\*](#), and tells the story of a young woman who has to carry a very painful tension (one that includes the same feelings found in Bridges of Madison County) for a long time. But unlike the characters in *Bridges of Madison County*, she doesn't move quickly to resolve it. Nobody is in bed with each other within a couple of hours. She carries the tension for a long time, years, and then finally when it is resolved there is true sublimity. Why? Because something can only be sublime if first there has been some sublimation (and for more than two hours!)

In essence, this expresses the meaning of Advent: for something to be sublime there must first be sublimation; fasting is the necessary prelude to feasting; greatness of soul is contingent on first nobly carrying tension; great joy is not experienced if one is not first properly prepared; and what's truly divine can only appear after a certain kind of gestation. Advent is about proper waiting.

It should therefore not to be confused with Lent. The crimson-purple of Advent is not the black-purple of Lent. The former symbolizes yearning and longing, the latter repentance. *The spirituality of Advent is not about repentance*, but about carrying tension without prematurely resolving it so that what's born in us and in our world does not short-circuit the fullness that comes from respecting love's rhythms.

What is the connection here? How does carrying tension help lead to the sublime? It does it by helping to produce the heat required for generativity. An image might be helpful here. John of

the Cross, in his book, [\*The Living Flame of Love\*](#), compares our pre-advent selves to green logs that have been thrown into a fire, the fire of love. Green logs, as we know, do not immediately burst into flame. Rather, being young and full of moisture, they sizzle for a long time before they reach kindling temperature and can take into themselves the fire that is around them so as to participate in it. So too the rhythm of love: only the really mature can truly burst into flame within community. The rest of us are still too self-contained, too green, too selfish, too damp. We don't burst into flame when love surrounds us. Rather our dampness helps extinguish the communal flame.

What helps change this is precisely the tension in our lives. In carrying properly our unfulfilled desires we sizzle and slowly let go of the dampness of selfishness. In carrying tension we come to kindling temperature and are made ready for love. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, as a scientist, noticed that sometimes when you put two chemicals into a test-tube they do not automatically unite. They only merge at a higher temperature. They must first be heated to bring about unity.

There's an entire anthropology and psychology of love in that image. In order to love we must first be brought to a higher psychic temperature. What brings us there? Sizzling in tension, not resolving things prematurely, not sleeping with the bride before the wedding, not trying to have the complete symphony within two hours.

The sublime has to be waited for. Only when there is first enough heat will there be unity. To give birth to what's divine requires the slow patience of gestation. In short-hand, that's the algebra of Advent.

<http://liturgy.slu.edu/index.html>

(main site from which the Bible study is composed)