

The Holy Spirit Province

NEWSLETTER

1 December 2021



GOD IS COMING TO CHANGE US: 2ND SUNDAY OF ADVENT C

Baruch 5:1-9; Philippians 1:4-6, 8-11; Luke 3:1-6

When someone is brave enough or rude enough to point out something wrong with us, we may admit that it's true, but do nothing about it. Like the father who said to his daughter, 'we must have a little chat', to which she replied 'the only time we ever have a little chat is when you want to lecture me about something.'

We know from experience that admitting the truth doesn't force us to change our ways. When our self-esteem takes a big beating from the truth, the truth may paralyse us. We're too old, we think, or too set in our ways to be born again as a better person. Not now, we think, or at least not yet. Just like St Augustine who once prayed to God: 'Give me chastity, but not yet.' But that was before he changed his ways completely for the better!

In today's readings, four messengers of God encourage us to imagine that better future that God intends for us, and to live and act accordingly. Thus, the prophet Baruch assures people that God has not forgotten them. So, he urges them to swap their garments of sorrow and distress for the cloak of God's goodness and integrity. The psalmist asks people to imagine a time when they will be exiles and slaves no longer, but go back home with joy, carrying the sheaves of grain they harvest along the way. In his letter to the Philippians, Paul praises them for how they have helped him in his work, and urges them to prepare for the day 'when you will reach the perfect goodness' that Jesus will produce in them. Finally, John the Baptist urges his hearers to 'prepare a way for the Lord', and get ready for the days when all human beings will finally 'see the salvation of God.'

Notice that none of those four speakers confronts the people with the bare, unvarnished truth of what's wrong with them. Each messenger speaks a message of hope, encouragement, and affirmation. 'The times they are a-changing,' they say. God is nearby, and is coming to change things, is coming to give you a brand-new start. 'So, seize the day,' God's messengers say, 'that brand-new day that God is offering you now. You can do it because your God is right beside you.'

So, all our Readings today share this wonderful insight: - We begin to change when others encourage us to see the best in ourselves, not when we are urged to dwell on the worst in ourselves. Simply telling people what's wrong with them may leave them a train-wreck - feeling helpless, hopeless, and isolated, and with no one to care whether they change or not. If we are to leave behind our bad and hurtful ways, we don't need someone pouring poison and vitriol onto our wounds. We need acceptance and encouragement, to imagine ourselves differently, and to imagine the good influence we will have on others when we become better persons ourselves. So, we need to reflect on what kind of person God wants us to be. We also need greater faith in the power and love of God working in us to change us into the best people we can be. We also need to go on believing with Paul, then, 'that the One who began

this good work in you will see that it is finished’.

In our life project of becoming the best persons we can be, we need others to keep spurring us on, to keep urging us with the message, ‘Go on! You can do it!’ Just like the apostle Paul did with the people in his life. He was a ‘wounded healer’ himself, and had to make big changes in his own performance. The people he mixed with gave him so much encouragement and support that he became both a great human being and a great friend of Jesus. Not all at once, I might add, but gradually - one step at a time, slowly but surely!

‘How the mighty have fallen!’ we sometimes hear. That’s certainly what we heard a while back about the world’s greatest golfer then - Tiger Woods. But to his credit, he owned up and took responsibility for what he called his ‘transgressions’. He also spoke clearly of his determination to change: ‘I will strive to be a better person,’ he wrote on his website, ‘and the husband and father my family deserves.’

If our parish community is to be constantly converted to Christ, all of us have to both breathe in encouragement from others and breathe out encouragement to them. In our determination to become the best persons we can be, it may help to remember those famous words of Saint John Henry Newman: ‘To be human is to change. To be perfect is to have changed often.’

May the passion of Jesus Christ and his everlasting love be always in our hearts!

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