

Homily
December 4, 2022
2nd Sunday in Advent
23:39-37:39

Have you ever gone somewhere and not known how to get there? Just think about going to a parish where you're not used to going. Are there enough signs pointing the way? This building is there. (Pointing left.) That building is there. (Pointing right.)

(Microphone malfunction, replacement, then on...)

Let's go back to those directional signs. They're very important especially if they're there not only with words, but with an arrow. Go this way. Go that way. Go this way and you hope you don't see one that says, "Go that way." (pointing down) Arrows! They point to a destination. They're helpful signs to us of a path to follow.

We have two such arrows today. One is Isaiah the prophet. The other is John the Baptizer. Now, they're pointing in different directions, but the ultimate goal is the same.

Isaiah, as I said last week, was a prophet who prophesied for forty years and struggled with all of the things that were going on in his time: the Assyrians, the Babylonians, the internal struggles – the fears, the anxieties of what's going to happen now that the Northern Kingdom is carried away. Are we next? And when?

Today, Chapter 11 of Isaiah proclaims a leader. An ideal Davidic King, sprung from the root of Jesse, the father of David, the strongest and best king that Judea, Judah, Israel had ever known. This king, this Davidic figure: in the midst of all this turmoil Isaiah is pointing to this one, saying, he's powerful and he has specific virtues. And you know what those are: wisdom, understanding, counsel and fortitude, knowledge, piety, fear of the Lord.

These qualities reflect first, Solomon. Wisdom and understanding. David's son. Counsel and fortitude – the strength of David himself. Knowledge, piety, fear of the Lord – the very bedrock of all the prophets. All of this is going to be embodied in this Davidic figure. And this figure is going to lead with Justice. And Rightness. And Fairness. Especially for those who are the least of the least.

But more: In his time, creation will be righted back to the original period of Eden. It is this One, in his time, that this will take place. The lion will lay down with the lamb. And the cow will graze with the bear. I can't remember them all. I'm not a zoologist.

The child will be next to the adder's lair and not fear.

What a powerful re-creation of Creation. In that time. In that place. And it will not stop there. No. When the world, "the Nations," see this one and see what is taking place, they will be drawn to Zion, the Holy Mountain.

Powerful, hope-filled - - - to a people in distress. That hope, especially for the Gentiles is so well-reflected in the Second Reading. Our reading from Ephesians, shot through with a call for Unity of Jew and Gentile – all of the Nations together.

Such a direction. Isaiah points the way.

On the other hand, the Baptist. It's not quite such an uplifting proclamation, is it? No. this Baptist, he lives in the wilderness. He is an Elijah-type figure. Dressed like Elijah. Living in the wilderness. Listening to the Lord and drawing the people forth. And all of Judea and Jerusalem come out to him. Why? For the chance to repent of their sins.

In a tradition of the ancient Near East, they come out for a water bath in the Jordan. There they do it for repentance. They come to this one who has a message, not only for repentance, but for anyone who thinks they can do whatever they need to do on their own without God. Such as the Scribes and the Pharisees and the Sadducees: the religious elite at that time, who presumed that they had all the answers.

And he says, "No. You don't. You need to face your need for repentance. And if you don't, the wonder of this gift that is brought to you, it's going to be even more so brought by One who's to follow me." And that One will judge. And how will he judge? He will judge based on your fruits. Bear good fruit.

In Matthew's account, what does that mean? The Beatitudes. And Chapter 25:

I was hungry and you gave me food.

I was thirsty and you gave me drink.

I was naked and you clothed me, in prison and you visited me.

It's that fruit. Not presumption, by which you will be judged.

Two very different paths, one so uplifting. The other, challenging.

Brothers and sisters, in this Second Week of Advent, I would like to suggest that one or the other of these paths – that the one arrow Isaiah, the other John the Baptizer – is yours to follow.

Perhaps your life is in disarray. Perhaps you're fighting disease. Perhaps someone is dying. Perhaps...well, whatever in your life is overwhelming you. Perhaps your greatest need right now is to hear the prophet Isaiah, that there is this Davidic One. We call him the Lord, Jesus. Who is there to help you, to get you through, to rearrange and bless you.

Perhaps that's the path to the final destination you most need right now. Follow it this week. Reread the passage each day. Let it speak to your reality. Take it to heart as we were urged last week.

Or perhaps, my brothers and sisters, some of us here are in need of repentance. We know we are. Yet we struggle with that.

Or perhaps we are – I hate to say this – kind of like the Pharisees and the Sadducees: Oh! I'm just fine! I'm a Roman Catholic. I'm a Christian. I'm just fine.

That's pretty presumptuous, don't you think? It's a good thing to be, but are we presuming upon it? Is there in our life a need to return to God and say, "I repent. I have been baptized in the Spirit and the Fire. And yet, I still need to repent of something in my life that overrules the very truth that the Lord brings and that God would have us live. Perhaps that's your direction this week. It's ours to choose which path. But know that the final destination is the same:

To be in the Lord.

To be with the Lord.

To be for the Lord.

Even as we wait for his coming now, coming at Christmas or his coming at the end of time.