

Homily
December 8, 2024
2nd Sunday of Advent
16:48 -24:17

Often this time of year some choir or some symphonic group performs Handel's Messiah. Right? Has anyone ever been to the full-blown, you get to sing along Handel's Messiah? It's pretty scary if you can't read music. The one that always strikes me – due to our First Reading and Gospel -- put an earworm in my brain all week. (singing) "Every valley, every valley shall be exalted, shall be exalted..." I'm going to stop. I can't do that fancy stuff.

Every valley shall be filled-in, every mountain laid low,

that ALL might see the salvation of our God. (Baruch/Luke)

It's amazing Baruch uses this image and so does our Gospel writer, Luke, quoting Isaiah. Two different prophets proclaim that the obstacles of return from exile – whatever that might be – will be leveled. It's an amazing image.

Now sometimes we're so technologically advanced in our engineering, (and I'm not saying anything bad about engineers, here. Please. They help us live, right?) They build tall buildings and then somebody tries to leap over them. But that's another cartoon. (grin)

I think of the transformation in Southern Indiana when I-64 went through hills between Louisville and past the western area where the strip mines were. You talk about every valley being filled-in, the hills being used to fill that in, to make it possible for travel – unimpeded, efficient. The obstacles were removed.

And I think because of that, my brothers and sisters, there are times when we think, "Well, do we really need God? Look at what we can do. **We** can make the rough ways smooth. **We** can make it possible to travel through mountains and hills – through tunnels, as in Pennsylvania."

But God says for those who are in exile, like the people of Baruch's time, whether you think Baruch was written in the 6th Century during the Exile, because Baruch worked with Jeremiah – Baruch was his secretary, or you believe that it was in the 2nd Century when Baruch was collecting the poems. Because that's what basically Baruch is, a collection of five different poems to comfort the Exiles who have fled from the Greek kings, like Antiochus Epiphanes.

In both cases they longed to be home, but so many things would prevent them.

And in Luke's time, the Diaspora that had taken place because of the destruction of Jerusalem. The people were living like John, in a desert, their home was gone.

In both cases the Lord is going to make it possible to return.

What are your obstacles? I have one I didn't ask for (dislocated shoulder). We've got physical obstacles, right? That's why we have a ramp out here (pointing toward the east door.) We have found a way to help people.

So it's not necessarily physical, although we can always rely on someone to help us. Like, (referring to Mr. Bittelmeyer's cane) what's its name? Emily! Yeah. It's a good name. Yeah. Mine was known as, "Citizen. – Citizen Cane." (Laughter) It hangs in the closet for the next time I need him.

And sometimes it's like when Mary Morois is sitting over here with her service dog. She has this wonderful dog named Ivy that cares for her and helps her do things, that otherwise, would be dangerous. And it gives her a companion in her profound silence.

We can do all these different things. We can help others to overcome obstacles.

But what about the obstacle that keeps us from the Lord? We call it "sin." We call it "ignoring God." We call it many things.

Have we asked God to take away the barriers that might be our Exile from Him? That they might come to an end? Or that our approach to him might be more possible, more welcoming, more loving?

Every valley shall be filled, every mountain laid low.

What is it that is keeping you or me from grasping the hope of our salvation - *from grasping the hope of our salvation?*

Something to ponder during this Second Week of our Season of Advent.