

## Second Sunday of Advent, Year C

One of the great joys of loving is being able to give ourselves to the one we love. There is a wonderful peace when we can do this simply and happily and without reserve. God is love and so, to speak in human terms, God needs to give. God created the universe so that he could embrace it with love. That's why he made us. In one of his poems, Saint John of the Cross pictures God as creating the universe as a gift for his Son. He creates the world because he wants to give him a bride who will love him and who, because of this love, will be able to enjoy the love-life of the Blessed Trinity. Speaking of creation, the Son replies to his Father: 'I will hold her in my arms and she will burn with Your love, and with eternal delight she will exalt your goodness'(Romance 3.5).

Now, something got in the road. We call it sin. It is part of the human condition. It comes from our origins, so we call it 'Original Sin'. We inherit it from our ancestors and so each of us has our own special mix of it – different tendencies and addictions and impulses that draw our hearts away from the love for which we are made. It forms a kind of environmental sludge that none of us can avoid and it is not long before we add our own personal sins to it. We could liken it to an oil slick that clogs up the wings of a sea bird. The bird is fine. It is beautiful and is made to soar, but the sludge can make it very difficult, at times impossible, to do what it so longs to do. We are made to be embraced by God and by the whole of creation, but we can feel quite trapped and weighed down, sometimes because of our own sin, but often because the sin that is part of the human condition makes it so hard to fly, so hard to breathe, so hard to love.

Throughout Advent the Church offers for our reflection poem after poem from the Older Testament. From their experience of God, the inspired authors know that God longs to free them from the bondage of sin and its debilitating effects. They pray for the heavens to open up that the promised one, the Messiah, would come like dew on the grass to refresh our hearts.

This is where today's readings come in. Both the First Reading and the Responsorial Psalm speak of the wonder of being released from slavery. In this season of Advent our thoughts are constantly directed towards the Christ child - the simple, human way in which God came to us to induce us not to be afraid, but to reach out, as we all tend to do, and take the child into our arms. God longs to embrace us. If there is any hesitation, it comes from us. That is why we pray in today's Prayer: 'Remove the things that hinder us from receiving Christ with joy'.

In the Church's liturgy, we relive the mysteries of our faith. At Christmas God comes to us individually, as families, as a church, and to the whole world, in the simple, disarming form of a new-born babe. We all know the healing that the birth of a child can bring. The grace of Christmas is the offer to each of us of a whole new beginning of hope.

In one of his poems, John of the Cross, presents Simeon to us as an example of how we are to welcome the Christ-child. He speaks of 'the aged Simeon, burning with longing,

pleading with God that he might see the promised one. And so the Holy Spirit answered the good old man, and gave him his word that he would not see death until he saw Life descending from the heights, until he took God himself into his own hands, held Him in his arms, and pressed Him to himself' (Romance 6, 3-4).

There are only two weeks till Christmas. God wants each of us to experience what Simeon experienced. He wants to come to us in a special way, so that we can hold him in our arms and press him to our hearts. We can do this to the measure of our longing. If we are not longing for him and expecting him the way parents expect a child, and if we are not feeling the thirst of our hearts for him, Christmas will be a time when we are caught up in all the razzmatazz, and have no time for prayer and no time for our souls to quench their thirst.

Longing is important, but there are also things that have to be done. As the Gospel reminds us areas of our life that are empty have to be filled up; and other areas that have received too much attention have to be flattened out. There is a lot to be put in order. If we find ourselves walking on a winding path, it will have to be straightened, and rough roads will need to be smoothed. I am sure that with honest attention each of us can find examples of each of these situations that fit our lives.

What is so encouraging about the first reading from Baruch is that we are told that God is going to do the levelling and the straightening. Paul has the same message. Perfect goodness is going to be produced in us by Jesus. However, we must really want him to do it, and pray urgently for his healing grace, and be determined to follow his inspiration and to allow him to open our minds, soften our hearts and challenge our priorities. Why leave our souls parched like a desert for another year? Would you not like to open your arms like Simeon and press to your heart your heart's desire?

Let us conclude with a prayer. It is taken from today's Mass: 'Father, the day draws near when the glory of your Son will make radiant the night of the waiting world. May the lure of greed not impede us from the joy which moves the hearts of those who seek him. May the darkness not blind us to the vision of wisdom which fills the minds of those who find him. Amen.'