

Reflections on Sunday's Readings: December 9, 2018



“The Most High has done great things for us; we are filled with joy.”
Psalm 126: 3

Second Sunday of Advent [C]

Baruch 5: 1-9

Philippians 1: 4-6, 8-11

Luke 3: 1-6

Introduction

I like a lot of different kinds of music. I like to listen to “country” music especially when I am driving a long way. I like the way these songs tell stories, and there is often some kind of moral or faith dimension to them. But what I have heard is if you play country music records or discs backwards, the “dog comes back to life, the truck works, and the fiancé or spouse comes back home!” (Wink!)

I wanted to share this with you because it’s a cute way to begin to think about “transformation,” which is what the Season of Advent is all about.

Season of Hope

Advent is the season of hope, hope in God, for our own personal transformation, but even more for the transformation of the world. A very

fine spiritual writer, Fr. Ronald Rolheiser, has written a recent book called Sacred Fire. He offers in this book that we are born into life without a clear sense of who we are, without a solid sense of our worth, and without a sure conviction that we are loved, wanted, and lovable. In the Biblical sense, we are born “anxious.” In fact, for Jesus the opposite of faith is not doubt but anxiety.

We’re vulnerable, and a lot depends on those closest to us to bring us into a more solid sense of our identity, our self-worth, and our belovedness. We may here want to give thanks for those who did raise us with these values, but we know some did not receive these gifts. In truth none of us get 100% of what we need here, but God is ever at work to help us be assured in these areas of our lives.

God is working harder at this than we are, so much so that God comes in the flesh ... in Jesus, the Christ ... to renew these truths of our lives. The Season of Advent is that time to remember and grow in these truths and to receive Jesus’ love once again.

Anxiousness

Because of our “anxiousness” or vulnerability as human persons ... and sometimes because of the lack of support or nurture early on ... we sometimes try to gain these things “on our own.” We try to make them happen, when really they are gifts to be received.

We may though go down the path of the prodigal son and look for these things we desire “in all the wrong places.” We may go into sadness or depression. Or we may try the path of the “older son” in this parable and try to be perfect all on our own. Then we might take on an **attitude of moralism** towards others’ failings or weaknesses. I know this path in my life. Here we may move toward a superior or **critical attitude** toward others. We miss “**all that is given**” because we are on “survival” mode, or we are living in a way to merit what we need.

Mary

In contrast to all of this, we have Mary whose feast day was yesterday: the Immaculate Conception. Mary models, and enfleshes, for us the “mystical” approach to life. Mary lives with an openness to God’s presence and grace. Her receptivity bespeaks that she is a “mystic” in life. Mary approaches life with **an attitude or spirituality of union**.

Mary without sin (what this feast day celebrates) really means that she never fell into the illusion that she was separate from God, that she was apart from God. Instead she rested and acted in light of her communion with God in all the circumstances of her life. This is meant for all of us. True freedom is when we trust that we are in a relationship with One who loves us always.

True freedom is for **relationship**, not going it all alone; and this is how Mary lives. She is always ready to say yes in trust to God's presence with her.

John and Jesus' Times

In the times of John and Jesus, the world really didn't look like it was in the hands of God. Sin (being separated from God) had poisoned politics, economics, law, and everyday social interactions. You can see this in how they talk about demons and demonic possession. Some of this is because of where they were in terms of their understanding of human personhood, but their world was "haunted by evil." Anxiety in their times was very high, and it seemed that God was silent. Had God stopped speaking to them and being interested in them?

Then John the Baptist received the Word of God and heard God's plans for acting on behalf of the people, and all in the human family, very quietly in the desert. John prepares his society and community to receive the Messiah, the Anointed One of God, who is beyond our hopes and dreams.

The human family, especially the Jewish community, was awaiting a ruler or a warrior to help overthrow their oppressors; but what they received (and we too) is Jesus, the Word and Son of God, from the heart of the Trinity!

We are not separate from God. God is not silent. God is with us, and we are with God!

Conclusion

Jesus, the Word, comes into our flesh to help us see how close God is with us. God is with us and within all of creation; and our destiny is to live with this awareness so as to spark others to come alive.

We as Church are called to be radiant in this awareness of God being with us. We are called to live, like Mary, with receptivity and spontaneity to God's presence and hopes for us all. We are called to live in such a way that love can be seen and experienced.

I have one other image that often comes to mind during Advent. I like to think of all of creation, the whole cosmos, as a **tapestry**. Jesus' coming into our world and all of creation is like a "golden thread" being woven into our tapestry. Jesus' radiance begins to spread throughout all of creation ... transforming us with God's abundant love and mercy, justice and peace. This is our part in God's dreams for the world and the cosmos. Our availability and willingness to say "yes" to God's inspirations allows the world to be transformed; and this will be a transformation of our politics, our economics, our laws, and our social relationships, in light of God's abundant love for each of us, and all of us!

*Fr. Henry B. Beck, OFM / St. Francis Retreat House, Easton, PA
18045*