

2nd Sunday of Advent Cc

In the beginning of the gospel, we heard of a list of names and places that seem pretty irrelevant to what the gospel is about. We are interested in Jesus, right? Not in tetrarchs and outdated geography. But these details reveal something crucial about Jesus – that He is not an abstract God; that He came to walk with us. He is part of our human history. He weaves his action and presence into the fabric of ours. He is not a myth. He takes up his position on the crossroads of our personal experiences and connects with us there. Jesus Christ is a God who wants to be involved in our lives; He is a God who wants to be connected with us. This is why in our Advent liturgy, we are constantly reminded that “God has come” to visit his people; that “God has come” to dwell in our midst to form with us a communion of love and life.

St Paul reiterated this in our second reading: “I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work in you will continue to complete it until the day of Christ Jesus.” God doesn't create us and then forget about us, like some kind of divine architect or watchmaker. He gives us the gift of life, and then he accompanies us, gently trying to guide us into a deeper relationship with him, never giving up on us no matter what. He knows where we were born, where we grew up, what we have suffered and enjoyed, the wounds in our hearts. Nothing about our lives is indifferent to him, because we are not indifferent to him. As our first reading puts it, we should rejoice because we are “remembered by God.” God has chosen to become part of our personal lives. He knows our joys; He knows our sorrows. God has given us His only son to be our personal savior and Lord. It is in Jesus where we can find the fullness of our life and faith.

We have to remember, though, that the fullness of life and faith that our Savior brings is both fully dependent on him, who is willing to be involved in our lives, and also fully dependent on us. We can understand this by imagining a person trapped in a deep pit. So the pit is too tall for him to reach the top and lift himself out. The walls are too smooth for him to find handholds and footholds to climb up and out. So the person is helpless in the bottom of the pit. He needs someone to help him. But even if someone has tried to help him by lowering a ladder, the man

will only be saved if he freely chooses to step onto the ladder and climb out of the pit. The ladder will do him no good unless he uses it. We are that person, and the pit is this fallen world that we live in. Jesus himself is the ladder that God has lowered down to us. But even though God has given us a Savior, we have to freely choose to welcome him, to listen to him, to obey him, to have faith in him. That means intentionally accepting him in our lives and leaving behind our self-centered attitudes. We need to fill in the “valleys” of our souls, created by our shallow prayer life and a minimalist way of living our Faith. We have to straighten out whatever crooked paths we have been walking in our lives. If we have been harboring grudges or hatred, or failing to be reconciled with others, now is the time to clear away all the debris of our relationships. We have to live our faith. We have to transform our lives. We have to take care of our relationships.

Pope Francis, in his encyclical, *Lumen Fidei* – “*The Light of Faith*,” acknowledged that faith enhances our personal lives and relationships because it makes us aware of our magnificent calling, the vocation to love.” It shows us “how firm the bonds between people can be when God is present in their midst.” Faith “sheds light on every human relationship we have because it is born of love and reflects God’s own love” for all of us. For this reason, it enriches our human relationships, our ability to endure for the people we love, to be faithful and trustworthy to them, to enrich our life together.

There is a concern however that the encyclical noticed in our contemporary culture today – that it “has lost its sense of God’s tangible presence.” It is the belief “that God is to be found in the beyond, on another level of reality far removed from our everyday relationships.” But our gospel today reminded us that our God is a God who wants to be involved in our everyday lives. John the Baptist proclaims in the gospel that all flesh – every person – shall see the salvation of God. Isn’t that an amazing message? That God has come to save us; that He has become part of our personal lives? This is the foundation of our faith – God loves us! You and I are loved by our God! No one can ever take that away from us. No one can ever destroy our relationship with Him. And so let us firmly hold on to that love so that we can make it manifest in everything that we do and say in our lives. Amen.