

Second Sunday of Advent

By: Fr. Bob

There is a story from the Middle Ages about a young woman who was expelled from heaven. As she left, she was told that if she would bring back the gift that is most valued by God, she would be welcomed back. She brought back drops of blood from a dying patriot. She brought back some coins that a destitute widow had given to the poor. She brought back a remnant of a Bible that had been used for years by an eminent preacher. She brought back some dust from the shoes of a missionary laboring in a remote wasteland. She brought back many similar things but was turned back repeatedly.

One day she saw a small boy playing by a fountain. A man rode up on horseback and dismounted to take a drink. The man saw the child and suddenly remembered his boyhood innocence. Then, looking in the fountain and seeing the reflection of his hardened face, he realized what he had done with his life. And tears of repentance welled up in his eyes and began to trickle down his cheeks. The young woman took one of those tears back to heaven and was received with joy and love.

And then:

*In the film *The Cemetery Club*, Esther, a middle-aged widow, reflects on the sudden death of her husband, Murray: "By the time the ambulance got there, he was gone. It just seems so unreal, you know? There we were, enjoying a wonderful dinner and... When I got home that night, his cigar was still in the ashtray. His toothbrush was still damp. I just couldn't make sense of it, you know? It's like one day you're looking into his face as he proposes and the next day you're standing at his grave remembering how nervous he had been—and between those two days, 39 years had gone by!"*

Our scripture for this Second Sunday in Advent is a call—an invitation to use our time well. In our second reading, the apostle is challenging those who would think that the Lord is delaying to realize that indeed the Lord is coming. But we are given this time in between to grow, to love, to become, to prepare to be with the Lord. Our time is a gift.

In our first reading as well as the Gospel we are placed in the desert. The desert is the place where we are confronted with the realities of life. In the desert the people of ancient times, according to the author of Second Isaiah, realized what their God was calling them to. They remembered their exile and the reasons for exile; they realized the mercy of their God; they knew of the promise that was being unfolded for them.

In the Gospel, John the Baptizer stands confronting us and reminding us to use our time for conversion and growth—to turn to the Lord.

Our Advent that we are in the midst of is our desert time—a time in the midst of the hustle and bustle of this season to prepare—to use our days and opportunities to grow closer to the Lord so that we might recognize him at his coming.

We might mistakenly think that these days are so full of the world—of things that are not of God—that it is difficult to be holy—to be saved—to grow close to the Lord.

*Annie Dillard in her book *For the Time Being* talks about the importance of this present moment. She says:*

There were no formerly heroic times, and there was no formerly pure generation... There never was a more holy age than ours, and never a less.

In any instant you may avail yourself of the power to love your enemies; to accept failure, slander, or the grief of loss, or to endure torture.

Purity's time is always now... "Each and every day the divine voice issues from Sinai," says the Talmud. Of eternal fulfillment, Tillich said, "If it is not seen in the present, it cannot be seen at all."

And so this time for us is the time to look at and to decide how to use it—This is our time of preparation— not tomorrow or next year. This is the now.

We have been talking here as a community, for instance, on trying to be less violent—to be people who live in a Circle of Peace. The Southern Poverty Law Center has recently published a guide that tells us what we need to do now to respond to hate. Things we need to do in our desert time—to bring about the Prince of Peace:

First we need to act—we need to do things in the face of hate. We need to exercise decency—not just think about it.

Secondly we need to unite with one another. Create a coalition.

We need to support victims of hate. Surround them with people of love.

We need to do our homework and learn about people who are filled with hate -

Fifth we need to create an alternative—instead of attending a hate rally, the Law Center says we should have a unity rally or a parade for peace.

Sixth we have to speak up and be heard. Silence is deadly.

We need to lobby leaders and persuade politicians and business and community leaders to take stands against hate.

Eighth we need to keep at it—look ahead—keep working for peace—not just for a moment.

We need to teach tolerance to the youngest and

We need to dig deeper into the issues that divide us—economic inequality, immigration, etc.

The point is that we can't sit still. We need to use this day. It may seem daunting and tiring and overwhelming. But we do it as community. And we do it for salvation.

Now is the time—it is God's time, the apostle says, but it's been given to us. Let's live this Advent desert time well—and invite the Prince of Peace into our lives.

READINGS OF THE WEEK

Isaiah 40:1-11 2 Peter 3:8-14 Mark 1:1-8

December 10, 2017

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張 春 申 神 父

本主日讀的是四部福音中第二部馬爾谷福音開宗明義的一段話。一方面它說明這部書的確是為天下萬民報告教會所相信的福音——快樂的消息；這個好消息不是別的，便是耶穌基督。為什麼耶穌基督是好消息呢？因為教會相信，天主通過祂拯救了人類。另一方面這段話引領讀者探討耶穌基督究竟是怎樣的一個人。馬爾谷福音與第一部福音——瑪竇福音，以及第三部福音——路加福音不同。它沒有寫下耶穌誕生和童年事蹟，它直接介紹當時在巴勒斯坦的有名人物：若翰，想應用這樣的描寫，刺激讀者渴望快快會晤到基督，為能瞻仰祂、聆聽祂。如果我們透過今天福音，進入那時猶太人的內心，可能也會達到馬爾谷寫作的目的。

讓我們簡單地敘述一下以色列民族的歷史。這是一個自認為被天主所選的民族，因此堅信天主與他們同在。他們始終渴望一個美好的將來。至於這個美好將來，他們很久以來，相信要由一位稱為默西亞：受到天主傅油的使者來開啓。因此期待默西亞，或者默西亞主義，是以色列民族的特徵。為他們，歷史不是自趨滅亡，而是由天主完成，所以他們堅決地等待着，不論在成功或失敗中，不論在幸福或沮喪中。可是以色列民族的歷史究竟怎樣具體地演變呢？公元前一八五零年始祖亞巴郎的蒙召，始終在他們心頭上。此後，公元前一二五零年梅瑟率領以色列民族粉碎埃及法郎王鎖鍊的事業是他們信仰的基礎。當一零一零年達味王朝以及後來的撒羅滿王朝是黃金時代。但是撒羅滿之後，以色列便分裂為南朝猶大王國、北朝以色列王國。從此以後，一蹶不振，直到公元前第八世紀北朝被亞述滅亡，公元前第六世紀南朝被巴比倫滅亡。充軍流亡時代，猶太民族的默西亞主義反而更是熱烈期待默西亞來臨。可是即使充軍之後，回到祖國的猶太民族，始終生活在教難、迫害、貧窮……之中。受到波斯人、希臘人的欺凌，最後當若翰出現曠野宣講時，猶太人還在羅馬帝國的佔領下。但整個民族歷史堆積的逆難，並不使他們渴望默西亞的情緒消散。於是我們可以想像，當若翰高聲報告「那比我更有力量的，要在我以後來」的消息時，民眾是多麼興奮！不過若翰宣告要來的那一位默西亞，超出猶太人的理想，祂不只為猶太人，而且為全人類的救主。祂的救援，不是建立在暴力、流血、革命、殺戮上，而是建立在人類的互愛、和平相處、仁義公正上。所以若翰呼籲大家預備道路，他自己以水洗，洗刷罪過，而將要來的那一位，要以聖神洗滌罪污，使人成為天主的子女。

馬爾谷福音這樣把若翰在猶太人渴望的背景中推薦出來，實在願意後代的讀者，通過猶太人的遭遇和期待，想到每人的歷史或民族的歷史。我們每人的歷史是怎樣的呢？我們自己在渴望什麼呢？我們現在事實上又怎樣？我們中華民族的歷史是怎樣的呢？中國人在渴望什麼呢？我們中國人事實上又怎樣？也許，最後我們會發現，大家多麼渴望一個美好的日子；渴望生活富裕、安定和平。那麼至少我們基督徒會說，一旦大家接受了福音的理想，共同相愛，彼此尋求和平正義，那時不只會有一個美好的將來，永遠的幸福，而且連現世的生活也會改善了！這是真的嗎？是的，因為我們相信耶穌是天主派來的默西亞。

摘自「妙音送長風」