

## 2<sup>ND</sup> SUNDAY OF ADVENT, CYCLE C

*Baruch 5: 1-9 + Psalm 126: 1-6 + Philippians 1: 4-6, 8-11 + Luke 3: 1-6*

Holy Spirit Catholic Church: Sunday, December 6, 2015

On the first Sunday of Advent, the prophet Jeremiah spoke of the coming of the long awaited Messiah, the hoped for Savior, naming him the “*Lord our Justice.*” Throughout our lives of faith as we daily prepare for the advent of the Lord, we wait actively for the coming of the “*Lord our Justice*” by making right what has gone wrong in our relationships with one another, with God, and as well by living in right relationship with our common home, the Earth, as God’s gift to us.

By doing so, we hasten the coming of the Lord Jesus, the Just One.

But if we are honest with ourselves, we recognize that not only personally as individuals but collectively as a people we have made a mess of justice over the generations and centuries.

So much so that we can fear the coming of God into our lives because we know we have not totally righted the wrongs done.

However, on this 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Advent, the prophet Baruch reminds us that Justice’s companion is Mercy, and this truth fans the flame of hope in our soul.

In God, Justice and Mercy go together, and so the coming of God for which we actively await does not bring us fear of condemnation but the hope of consolation.

When we look back upon our lives, we see how God has leveled the mountainous wrongs we have done, or filled in the valleys of our failures to step up and do the right thing, making a road for us to come home to the merciful embrace of God.

Like the people of Israel in Baruch’s time, who live in exile and long to return home, we are a people who have experienced being cut off from our home in the heart of God.

We have all felt malaise, a certain “*blahness*” in our life, where because of our sinful choices we have distanced ourselves from God and our truest self as made in the image and likeness of God.

But the mercy of God, a special attribute of God’s love, finds a way to bring us home, re-energizing us to move forward toward our eternal home.

Even when we fail to keep God’s Law, when we stumble and fall into a deep valley of despair because of our sin, God’s mercy fills in this valley and God the Good Shepherd comes running to carry us home.

Or when we face the insurmountable mountain of “perfecting” our life, God’s mercy levels this mountain so that God comes running to meet us with unabated Joy, like the Prodigal Father welcoming his lost child home.

Sometimes we experience this undeserved mercy of God in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, and other times we experience it in the generous love of others, especially when tragedy suddenly cripples us.

Two softball teams play a championship game. The game is tied going into the bottom of the very last inning, when with 2 outs, the home team’s best hitter smashes a home run. She sprints around first base with great joy, only to realize she has missed touching first base, and as she suddenly plants her foot to turn back to touch first in order to proceed on her victory dash on around the bases, her leg gives out completely as she rips apart the ligaments supporting her knee. What had been a victory dash full of joy now becomes cries of complete agony. Her teammates rush out from the dugout to carry her around the bases, but the umpire stops them stating that the rules of the game do not allow this and that if they try to do so the home run will be turned into the 3<sup>rd</sup> out of the inning.

As the heroine lies writhing on the ground in pain, the first baseman from the other team asks the ump if she can assist the home run hitter, who has suddenly become crippled.

The ump states that there is nothing in the law of the game that prevents her from doing so. So the first baseman from the other team, and then the pitcher, and then the 2<sup>nd</sup> baseman and 3<sup>rd</sup> baseman join together to carry their opponent to 2<sup>nd</sup> base and then to 3<sup>rd</sup> base and *finally home*.

This is what the mercy of God looks like, where others are willing to “lose” themselves in order to bring us home to experience the victory of God’s redeeming love in Christ.

Most often we encounter the great gift of God’s mercy in the simple yet profound gift of another opportunity, another day to move forward again, another season to begin anew, to start afresh.

This fresh start, this beginning with a clean slate, is what a Jubilee Year is all about.

This coming Tuesday, December 8<sup>th</sup>, the Church throughout the world begins the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy.

In the history of the people of Israel, every 50 years was celebrated as a Jubilee, a special year of the Lord’s favor as expressed by the actions of His Chosen People. Every 50 years, debts were completely forgiven and all God’s people started over with their financial slates wiped clean and the crushing burden of debt removed from their shoulders.

Every 50 years, land that had been lost to another was given back to its original owner. The Jubilee for Israel was always a concrete reminder of how God’s mercy made everything new again and brought them back home.

This super-abundance of God's love that helps one to "come home" and to start one's life anew is expressed in the most powerful way in the person of Jesus Christ, the Savior of the World.

In the 15 page document "*Misericordia Vultus*,"

issued by Pope Francis this past April announcing this Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy, the Pope opens his remarks by stating something simple yet profound about our faith:

**"Jesus Christ is the face of the Father's mercy."**

When we look at Jesus, when we gaze upon him, we see Mercy enfleshed.

When we listen to his words and rejoice in his saving deeds, we see Mercy in action, the "always more" of God the Father's love for all of God's creation!

Pope Francis point out in this document on the Jubilee Year of Mercy,

that Jesus' mission is a mission of mercy,

saving the lost ones and healing the hurting ones,

bringing all to a knowledge of God's redeeming love.

Jesus does not look upon us with pity as if he is standing over us, separated from us, or act from the attitude of pity ("*You poor thing*"), but rather acts out of compassion by suffering with us.

This mission of mercy propels the 2<sup>nd</sup> Person of the Divine Trinity to empty himself of all divine rights and privileges to become little like us, to embrace the fullness of our humanity, to walk among us as one like us in all things but sin.

He calls his disciples who have experienced the saving power of His merciful love to embrace His mission of mercy by seeking out the lost and bringing them home to His Father. To create the world anew by the power of His merciful love.

Pope Francis not only spells out our mission in this special year of divine favor, but he also gives us a very practical way to live out this mission by practicing the corporal and spiritual works of mercy.

The Pope's "***burning desire***" is that we reflect upon and act upon the corporal and spiritual works of mercy.

Pope Francis believes this will awaken our consciences, which have often grown dull in the face of poverty, and allow us to enter more deeply into the heart of the Gospel where the poor have a special experience of God's mercy.

Jesus himself speaks about almost all of the **corporal works of mercy**

when he paints a picture of the Final Judgment in the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 25:

*Feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, welcome the stranger, visit the sick and the imprisoned.*

The final corporal work of mercy--bury the dead—is not included in Matthew 25 but has long been practiced as one of the corporal works of mercy.

The spiritual works of mercy have been practiced by disciples throughout the centuries: Counsel the doubtful, instruct the ignorant, admonish sinners, comfort the afflicted, forgive offences, bear patiently those who do us ill, and pray for the living and the dead.

Pope Francis reminds us that when we reach out to help others through the corporal or spiritual works of mercy, we are actually serving and loving the broken body of Christ living in them. The Christ who longs to come to us this Advent, to set us free from our anxieties and fears, comes to us in these “*little ones*,” whom we are called to serve in merciful love. By doing so, we prepare the way for the Lord of mercy to not only come through us to them but to come to us through these little ones.

We mistakenly think that whenever we help the poor or visit the imprisoned or care for the forgotten ones of this world that we are saving them, but actually, as Pope Francis teaches us over and over again, we are being saved by them.

We think we are saving them from despair, but they are saving us from the heart-numbing daily despair of modern life which has turned people in on themselves.

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