

Church of the Good Shepherd
and
St. John the Evangelist

2 Advent
December 10, 2006
Fr. Bill McGinty

“Cry of the Prophet”

Today the 2nd Sunday of Advent, a voice is heard, beyond the Jordan. It is the cry of John the Baptist. “Make straight the way of the Lord!” It has resounded down the centuries to remind human kind that God, their God, is speaking to them and it is time to listen.

John’s message is not for the crowd or the nation. It concerns itself not with Kings and Princes. John’s message is for every individual human heart. It is not just a message for a bye gone day. It is God speaking to you in the now of your life.

“How long? How long can you live your life without me? How long must I wait to get your attention? Do you believe that you will live forever and have no need of me?”

John’s cry is the cry of the prophet. And a prophet does not cry in vain. A prophet cries that God might be heard and he says: “How long, before Christ, the Christ is born in your heart? Is this the year that your faith bursts into flames and you accept that God, Spirit and love are one thing?”

Accept Jesus and you turn your life around. Accept Jesus and you escape a mountain of technology and gadgets you think you need to hold you up. Escape over the mountain and find the fresh sweet love of your Creator and then you will find peace with every other human heart.

This morning the Baptist cries out to each one of us to prepare the way of the Lord. Prepare your heart that your God may enter in.

Many years ago, I met a student in Europe called Rudy. He had grown up in Hungary in the fifties and sixties while it was still under Communist rule. Those of us in the West, who have always known freedom and justice, have little idea what it means to live under oppression. Political and religious inequality has subtle ways of grinding you down, beginning with what you are forbidden to read, write or even say. To hear your children come home from school spouting Communist propaganda is the equivalent of seeing them wading waist deep through a pig farm. How do you reverse what they have been forced to recite and chant day after day? How do you live for 50 years listening to radio broadcasters praising the merits of a regime you know to be intrinsically evil? How do you stomach the hypocrisy of the green, white and red of the Hungarian flag you love, being flown at the Olympic Games, when the people it represents have not the freedom to cross a border?

In the December of 1972 we were preparing for Christmas by going through the Advent season. Rudy stood up and told us what these Advent readings truly mean to a people who

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are not free. How they gather around the fireplace at night to read the words of prophets from so long ago that seem so prevalent for them today.

I thought of Rudy and his people this week as I read today's Canticle.16: "to set us free from the hands of our enemies, free to worship him without fear." As a young man Rudy was smuggled out of Hungary over the mountains into Austria. For months he had been followed by the secret police. Twice he had been taken into custody and questioned, because they suspected he was secretly training to be a priest. Rudy was afraid for his family and finally agreed that he must leave Hungary. So late one night his friends came for him and took him away first by car, then bicycle and finally on foot with a mountain guide over the mountains.

Every Advent spoke to Rudy, probably more than the rest of us, in these sacred readings from the scriptures. "The people who have walked in darkness have seen a great light. To those who have walked in the Valley of the shadow of death, a light has shone." The story of Mary, Joseph, and Jesus fleeing by night from their native home resonated with Rudy each year.

One night we went out to an old English Pub where we sat and talked with some friends. One of them turned to Rudy and said: "So what about the secret police, were you guilty? Were you up to no good you and your Catholic friends?"

Rudy looked at him over the top of his beer glass. He put it down, wiped his mouth and said: "Absolutely! We were guilty as hell. Not only was I secretly training to be a priest, but I was doing everything I could to subvert the Communist state. They put up posters, we ripped them down. They taught communism to the kids at school, we untaught them at home. They taught the party, we taught the Gospel. They sang "The Red Flag" we sang our Christian Hymns. And we always knew that one day we would win. One day the walls will come tumbling down because we have the awesome power of our God with us."

As the years rolled by I often wondered about Rudy. I wondered how he celebrated in 1989 when the Berlin Wall did come down. I would look at the Green, white and red of Christmas and remember how it meant something else to Rudy and his Hungarians. And I'd remember Advent and how each year it gave them hope that one day the Lord would come for them and defeat their enemies so that they could indeed worship their God in freedom.

The words of Advent should still make our bones tingle. We should still be plotting a conspiracy. We should still be meeting secretly to overthrow a regime that sees no meaning in stars, angels, wiseman traveling vast distances through the night and shepherds waiting and watching on hillsides.

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In our first reading Baruch the Prophet is the companion and biographer of Jeremiah, who has gone into exile in Egypt. He looks to a day when Jerusalem will rise again and every Israelite will rejoice.

St Paul, too writes to the Philippians full of pride that the work he began in that little town has now borne fruit. For once they struggled and fought among themselves, but now they are everything the church should be. Paul languishes in prison in Rome. He knows that the end is near and soon he will face death. But now all his faith fills him with confidence, that he, the only Apostle not to see Jesus will at last be united with him. He has finished the race and kept the course, now he looks forward to the reward that is his.

Advent too, points us all towards Resurrection and the end of our waiting. Christ the Lord is being born that salvation may be ours. Luke in his Gospel proclaims it in the words of John the Baptist in the desert: "Prepare the way of the Lord." This is surely our job also, to prepare the way for Christ to come into our hearts.

Advent should leave us convinced that we too are the remnant, the few who know the meaning of Christ in this world. We ask ourselves in these weeks whether we ourselves walk a straight path. Advent questions our integrity, it worries our conscience. It forces us to question whether we too have surrendered the battle. The battle of greed and materialism that has been lost in much of society.

Advent points us towards stewardship and asks us to re-engage the enemy and take up our sword of responsibility.

Advent nudges our conscience and tells us to follow Mary and Joseph searching for a place where Jesus the Christ can be born.

It is not a journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem; it is a journey from Bethlehem to Kajo-Kegi. It is a journey into poverty where there truly is no room at the Inn. This year the people of that sad country will gather around the Nativity, just like us, and just like us they will seek to give the Messiah shelter.

Advent tells us that the Christ will choose the poorest stable in Sudan to be born. And if we were as wise as the Magi we would travel there too.

Instead, we will send our gift and we will send our love, for the children of that place. It is our Magi gift and it helps each one of us recognize the meaning and spirit of Advent, as together we say: "Come Lord Jesus. Come into our hearts, give us hearts of flesh, to see you in the plight of others this Christmas, your salvation. Let us respond to them as we would respond to you. "For when you did it for one of these, my little ones, you did it for me."

Amen+

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