

2nd Sunday of Advent

Nine soldiers received over-night passes from their base camp. When morning came, not one of them was present. An hour later came the first soldier. Because he was late, he had to report to the commander. He apologized for being late and said, "I had a date and lost track of time and missed the bus. So I hired a cab, and it broke down on the way, and so I bought a horse from the nearby farm. But the animal suddenly fell and died a mile before I could get here." A little later the second soldier came in, and he had the same story. And a little later still came the third, and then the fourth, and on up to the eighth. All had the same story—had a date, lost track of time, missed the bus, hired a taxi, it broke down, bought a horse, and it fell down and died. So when the ninth soldier came in, the commander knew the story very well. So he told the soldier, "I know. You had a date, lost track of time, missed the bus, hired a taxi, it broke down, . . ." The soldier interrupted and said, "No, sir. The cab was fine. But there were so many dead horses on the road that it took a long time to get through."

Excuses are as old as the human race itself. I have caught myself giving excuses. We often give excuses for our wrong doings. Some people come to confession and give excuses for their sins instead of confessing their sins. Confession is not a place to excuse ourselves but to accuse ourselves. In the gospel of today, John the Baptist reminds us not to make lame excuses but to repent and renew our lives to receive the Messiah.

The season of Advent challenges us to take a hard look at ourselves to see how we are preparing for the second coming of Christ, to see how we are preparing to receive him at Christmas, and to see how we are preparing to receive him in the Eucharist in a few minutes from now. In the first reading of today, the prophet Baruch is giving hope and vision to the people of Israel who were in exile. John the Baptist appears in the gospels of the second and third Sundays of Advent, reminding us that if we want to prepare properly for the coming of Christ, we need to listen to his message. He came to prepare the way of the Lord and make straight his path. He exhorts us to remove from us the mountain of pride, and fill the valley of our souls with prayer and other activities that will help the growth of our faith. This valley has been created in our soul because of our shallow prayer life and the lukewarm living of our faith.

John the Baptist was the prophet prophesied by Isaiah who came to prepare the way of the Lord. "Every valley shall be filled. Every mountain shall be leveled. The winding roads shall be made straight and rough ways made smooth." What is the mountain that needs to be levelled? The mountain of pride? What are winding roads in your life that need to be straightened? What are the rough ways in your life that need to be made smooth? What is the valley, the weakness, in you that needs to be filled, that needs to be strengthened? How do we fill a valley? We throw lot of rocks and dirt into it. To fill your weakness, the valleys in your life, throw a lot of prayer and spiritual practices into them.

There are many things that you can do to grow in faith this season of Advent. For example: attending a bible study, reading the bible daily, reading a few spiritual books this year, reading lives of the saints, attending a weekday Mass, coming to church 15 minutes before Mass, spending some time in Eucharistic adoration, praying the rosary, praying the divine mercy chaplet, sharing your faith with someone, or spending some time exercising your faith in action and so on. This Advent could be a good time. Making that resolution to join the journey of faith is a wonderful way you can prepare to celebrate Christmas.