

Homily for the 2nd Sunday of Advent

Everyone was glued to television on Thanksgiving morning as they watched the 85th Macy's Day Parade begin at 9:00 AM sharp. Of course, the parade always ends with the arrival of Santa. A local newscaster was with the crowd of parade-watchers, welcoming Santa as he arrived in town. In a live interview he asked a bright and excited four-year-old girl if she had talked with this Santa yet to give him her Christmas list. "No" she replied emphatically. "Are you going to talk with Santa? Are you going to give him your list of toys that you want?" the newscaster asked. "NO!" she screamed. "Why?" he asked. "Because the real Santa is at the Mall."

The little girl may have known where to look for the "real Santa". I wonder if we know where to look for the "real Christ." For just as the Macy's parade marked the journey toward the celebration of Santa's arrival in our homes, so the Season of Advent heralds the journey of faith toward Christmas when Christ comes into our world. But where should we look for Him?

Looking is certainly central to today's Gospel. The people of Palestine and Jerusalem were looking for something...for someone. Why else would they have traveled the distance and gone into the desert to see

this eccentric man who dressed strangely and was unkempt and unattractive? They must have thought that he was the real thing...the messiah they had been waiting for.

Well...too bad. Wrong place...wrong person. Isn't that just like us...to always look in the wrong places. We look at manger scenes and beautiful decorations. We listen to the carols of Christmas and find them enchanting. Christ must be in all of these. And yet how often do these *indications* of Christmas end up being more hollow than holy....more sentimental than sacramental. We end up in the wrong place.

Maybe that's because the wrong place is any place outside of ourselves. Christ comes to a place within ourselves. Christ comes to our hearts and rests in the manger of our spirits. Christ who was born into time over 2000 years ago need not be reborn again except within each one of us.

And so the voice of John the Baptist calls out. He offers us the same message he offered those who followed him into the desert. He says "prepare the way." Prepare for Christ. Prepare by looking at the potholes in the winding roads to our own hearts...those potholes that we create by our own sinfulness...our acts of selfishness, our concern only for ourselves, our endless need to control instead of letting go and letting God take over.

When we attend to those “potholes” we clear the way to our hearts so that Christ can enter. And He is born in our hearts, so that we can once again heed the ancient words of the prophet Isaiah and bring comfort and consolation to those in need. When Christ is found within ourselves we can learn to speak more tenderly to our families, friends and neighbors, more gently to those with whom we work, and more compassionately to the stranger and those who struggle with life because life itself has become such a heavy burden.

Popular performers love to sing that Christmas is “the most wonderful time of the year.” It’s true...it is. But it is only wonderful when we have cleared the way so that the light of Christ shines from our heart into the hearts of others.