

Pastor's corner - December 11, 2011 - God speaks to us in our wilderness

Since the beginning of Advent we have been asked to continue to actively search for God in our lives or in the words of Jesus to “**stay awake**”, to watch and actively wait in prayer for the rebirth of Christ in our hearts and in our world. Isaiah (40:1-11) called on us “in the wilderness to prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.”

That wilderness if first of all ourselves! After all, we all live at times in human situations of loneliness, of barrenness and emptiness, of emotional and spiritual chaos. We all go through desert experiences: the death or absence of a loved one; a sudden unexplained or maybe a long-lasting illness; an accident; the loss of a job; separation or divorce; an uncertain future; or maybe simply the maturing as a teenager or as some one entering that supposedly “golden” age. Well, God spoke to the Hebrew people in the wilderness, in their exile far away from home when everything seemed to be lost. He did so through messengers such as Isaiah, John the Baptist. **In the same way God speak to us in our own wilderness, in our own deserts, in our own moments of desolation. And again God uses messengers to reach out to us wherever we are.** These can be parents, children, friends, strangers, events in our lives as well as the Word of God spoken, broken open for us each Sunday or at other life-giving moments. **It is amazing how God finds some surprising ways to reach out to us. I suspect that God uses twitter and facebook! I am sure God is into all those fancy ways of communicating! After all, isn't he the ultimate source of all these wonderful creations which we as humans are capable of?**

I know for sure that God comes to us especially in the wilderness of our lives. The eminent Protestant theologian Howard Rice was once asked: “How is it that you have become so wise?” He fell silent and his eyes filled with tears. Then, grabbing the sides of the wheelchair in which he was sitting, Rice choked out these words: “MS mm ss, multiple sclerosis! I was pastor in Chicago, doing great. Things were going well. But you know what I was doing? I was living on talents. I was preaching on talent. I was ministering on talent. I was administrating, doing pastoral care and all the things that I had learned ... all on my talent, with God's blessing of course! But when I got multiple sclerosis, I could not handle it because I couldn't walk anymore. I had to give up a lot; suddenly I stopped living on my talent and started to live in trust and it changed my life. I thank God (as he grabbed his wheelchair), **I thank God for my multiple sclerosis. God didn't bring it to me, but he sure used it to help me mature in my faith, to find him and to trust him.**”

We all have our own stories, our own moments of truth or we will have sooner or later, you can be sure! **In this Advent season God invites us to recognize him, not somewhere outside, but rather within the wilderness of our lives.** It is there that we are challenged to respond and to act or re-act concretely. Christmas time brings us to reflect on many things. Isn't it amazing how God finds surprising ways to come back into our lives again and again? If only we could recognize them, learn from them, discover in them the presence of God who calls forth, who challenges us to find a deeper meaning in whatever happens to us. Yes, God is like the shepherd in Isaiah who cares and comforts us (Isaiah 40:1-11), who is faithful to his promises, all the while entering into our pains to transform them into new life. A new road is being cut through the desert and it is Jesus who will help us deal with hills and valleys too difficult for us to overcome alone.

On this Gaudete (“Rejoice!”) Sunday, we can truly rejoice because God is near, because we are willing to come before God as we are in order to be liberated from sadness and to be freed of all that encumbers our lives. That is why we are invited to **come to St. Elizabeth this coming Thurs. Dec. 15 at 7:00 pm when we will all approach our God with humility and ask for forgiveness during our community celebration of reconciliation (confession). Micah 6:8: “What God wants of you. Only this, to do what is right, to love tenderly, and to walk humbly with your God.”**