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## **God is a Novelist.**

**by Fr John**

In the account of her conversion to Christianity, Lauren Winner makes the following observation: “God is a novelist. He uses all of sorts of literary devices: alliteration, assonance, rhyme, synecdoche, onomatopoeia. But of all these, His favorite is foreshadowing. And that is what God was doing [in the previous events in her life]. He was foreshadowing. He was laying traps, leaving clues, clues I could have seen had I been perceptive enough” (Girl Meets God, p. 57). God has been and continues to do the same things in our lives, as well. He offers us clues and provides experiences and relationships which set traps for us. But, as with Lauren, it is sometimes difficult to see what He is doing at a particular moment.

I have mentioned before my interest in the expression of the Roman philosopher, Seneca, that: “Luck is what happens when preparation meets opportunity.” It seems to me that one could easily substitute the words, “the spiritual life” for “luck” and the expression would still work fine. For the work of preparation involves the belief that God is working with and will utilize every one and bit of our talents and experiences both good and bad. He is both involved in all that prepares us and with the opportunities that will emerge. Now, whether we recognize His activity or see it simply as coincidence or fate, will be up to us.

This year on Sunday February 2, we celebrate two moments of preparation and opportunity. The first is the Great Feast of the Meeting of the Lord in the Temple (Luke 2:22-40). This Feast demonstrates how Joseph and Mary fulfilled the expectations of the Law as assumed for the birth of firstborn male child. But the other characters in the story are Simeon and Anna – those who “meet” Jesus in the temple. They have been prepared for this moment or rather “it had been revealed to Simeon by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Messiah” (2:26) and he was “guided by the Spirit” that day in coming to the temple. Likewise, Anna had spent her life within the temple worshipping “there with fasting and prayer night and day” (2:37). God had been preparing them for this moment, for this encounter with Jesus.

The other theme of this Sunday is the story of Jesus meeting Zacchaeus, the first of the Pre-Lenten Gospel lessons (Luke 19:1-10). Zacchaeus, with the reputation as an unfair tax collector, nevertheless, felt the deep need of seeing Jesus and so, being short, he climbed a tree. Jesus calls him down, saying that “I must stay at your house today.” And the response is that “he hurried down and received him joyfully” (19:5-6). This Gospel story forms the central part of the prayer read during the blessing of homes, when we pray that Jesus would indeed enter into and be part of our home

life.

These stories of Simeon, Anna, and Zacchaeus remind us how God – the Novelist – is the one who designs the details and conditions of our life stories. He prepares everyone, lays out the clues, fills us with questions and certain hungers that can only be satisfied by the encounter with Him.