

2nd Sunday of Advent
December 9, 2018
“From Stress to Peace”

Bar 5:1-9
Phil 1:4...11
Lk 3:1-6

My Brothers and Sisters in the Lord –

Every age has its built-in stressors. In every generation, people will be stressed by things outside themselves. There is no way we can isolate ourselves completely from society, the culture, the politics, and the moral values of those around us.

And, perhaps the greatest stress of all is within our souls and spirits as we face the moral challenges of living a good life. Human beings, while created to be good, are fundamentally flawed. We don't like hardship. We don't want to feel deprived. We want to fit in. We want to be accepted by those around us.

Consequently, often we choose the easy way. We succumb to the lure of wealth, power, and eros. We make mistakes; we make the wrong choices; we sin; and we thwart the plan of God for us and for the human race itself!

Furthermore, as we stray from what is good, true, and authentically beautiful – we, eventually, lose our way. Then, we can despair of finding our way back to God who created us for far more – both in this life and in the next!

The Chosen People had lost it all! They had made all the mistakes that we continue to make ourselves: socially, culturally, politically, and morally. The most guilty, probably had no idea why things had gone so badly – because God was not truly important in their lives.

However, the true believers – the faithful few – needed hope. So the prophet Baruch wrote a letter to them while they were on their journey to Babylon. He did this to renew their hope and trust in God. Thus, in the first reading, God promises restoration and renewal, someday, in a new existence even beyond what they could dream or imagine!

In the Gospel selection, St. Luke enumerates all the political and religious stressors John the Baptist and Jesus had to face when they began their ministries. These were Caesar, Pontius Pilate, Herod and Philip, Annas and Caiaphas. These powerful men and their minions would each, in their own way, assault the life of John or of Jesus in the future.

Nevertheless, God spoke His words of hope amid all the stresses, challenges, moral dilemmas, and sinful failures of the people. John proclaimed that there was a wonderful plan for the future. Their sins, however great, could be forgiven. All the rough, crooked, and winding ways of their lives and hearts could be smoothed and straightened. Even the mountains of resistance and the canyons of emptiness within them would disappear before the grace and the gift of God!

All they had to do was repent! Moreover, all that was unworthy within them – their lust for wealth, power, and pleasure – could see the salvation of God – if they would change their hearts and lives!

In the New Testament reading, St. Paul was under house arrest in Rome, awaiting trial and eventual execution. Paul has risen above all the stressors that surround him. He prays that the Christians of Philippi will rise above the persecution and hardships they are facing. He is confident that God will continue to work in their hearts. He also prays that their love and understanding of all that God wants for them will increase, until the moment that Jesus comes to take them into the kingdom!

Brothers and Sisters, we can't escape the stresses and the moral challenges that a bankrupt culture brings to a true disciple. But we can rise above them. We don't have to allow the holidays to overwhelm us or get us down. We don't have to buy into all the materialism, artificiality, and hyper-activity that is rampant during this season.

Not at all! We can stop! We can center ourselves! We can open our hearts to God and to what God is asking of us. We can let go of unworthy attachments and sins! We can truly repent! Above all, we can make space in our lives for the Christ – for he comes to change our stress into peace of heart and soul.

So, let us pray that we can make the changes necessary to receive this wonderful gift!

Amen.

December 9, 2018

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