

[Readings: Baruch 5:1-9; Psalm 126; Phil 1:4-6, 8-11; Luke 3:1-6]

When I first arrived here in July of 2014, it was easy for me to “sneak in the crowd” on my day off or if I was leaving for a break or retreat wearing a regular man’s shirt, slacks or jeans, tennis shoes and a canvas jacket. I could walk around the parish buildings undetected.

Now, 7 ½ years later, I can no longer be anonymous like some “Clark Kent” when I am not vested as a liturgical “Superman” or wearing my Roman collar. I am easily recognized in local restaurants at lunch time, at the store, and even at Subway. A little boy raced up to me and hugged me and said, “I’ve never seen you outside of church! I didn’t know that you had legs!”

Running errands while dressed in civilian clothes in my former parish, a young mother a few years ago was stunned that I recognized her at Target. I remembered her from being in my communion line at Mass. With other people in the aisle listening to our conversation, she said, “I’m sorry, Fr. Nick, I didn’t recognize you with your clothes on!” What she MEANT to say was, “I’m sorry, Fr. Nick, I didn’t recognize you with regular street clothes on.”

As they ask celebrities on the red carpet at awards ceremonies: “What are you wearing?” “WHO are you wearing?” Our readings for this Second Sunday of Advent are all about clothing. More specifically, about putting on the right kind of clothing. During their wait for the Messiah, the Israelites wore various kinds of clothing. Their “spiritual wardrobe” reflected their historical circumstances as well. In the times of the patriarchs, they were dressed like nomads. When they were forced to work in Egypt, they were dressed like slaves. After their freedom and wandering in the desert, they wore a bride’s dress as the beloved one of God. And in the dark centuries of their routine unfaithfulness, they wore the dress of a harlot.

Now, Baruch is telling them to take off the dark and somber clothing of the widow, the “robe of mourning and misery” and put on the “splendor of glory from God forever.” They are told to be wrapped in the “cloak of justice” from God because of God’s intervention and intercession on their behalf.

In our Second Reading, St. Paul exhorts us to become people of visitation and hospitality, living in a right relationship with God, with others and with oneself. He uses words which would become paraphrased in every official ceremony of the Roman Catholic Church for those admitted to Holy Orders and to the Consecrated Religious Life: “May God Who has begun this good work in you bring it to completion.” All of us are encouraged by St. Paul to increase “in knowledge and in every kind of perception.” To discern what is of value. Pray to be set on fire with the Holy Spirit to be a light in the darkness of our world.

When St. Paul wrote the Letter to the Philippians, he was in prison, again, in either Ephesus or in Rome and could have already been sentenced to death. This particular letter to the Philippians was his “love letter” to the community which was probably the closest to his heart, as this community, as you are to me.

As St. Luke composed HIS words, he is very specific about who was in political charge at the time. He gives us the VIP list of all the weak and misdirected actors who will play pivotal roles in the drama that Jesus Christ will bring, especially in his last days and weeks on earth. Luke wants us to know that both John the Baptist and Jesus Christ were real people in real time.

The clothing of St. John was camel hair – not quite cashmere! And he is calling on his audience to put on the clothing of repentance and conversion. John was incredibly brave to do what he did, to challenge the crowds to embrace a message of forgiveness and to accept a baptism of water.

In this Advent season, like St. John and like Jesus Christ, we are called to be prophetic voices in our modern-day desert of ignorance, apathy, neglect and violence, especially in Oxford. As our parish mission statement says: “To strive, to celebrate and to serve.” In this way, we can become highway builders through difficult terrain, to make smooth a path so that by our lives, our witness and our example, we can lead others to see and to put on the salvation of our God. So... Who are YOU wearing today? Come, Lord Jesus!" AMEN!