SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT, CYCLE C

Opening prayer: God of mercy, we gather together as sons and daughters of your promise. You gave us the prophets to show us how to hope in days of mourning. You gave us John the Baptist as a signpost to Jesus. You gave us Jesus that all the peoples of the earth might see the salvation of God. As we gather today, open our hearts to hear your Word so that it can teach us the true spirit of this season. This we pray through Christ our Lord, Amen.

Sharing of life: What are you most and least grateful for this past week?

Facilitator reads focus statement: In the first reading, Jerusalem is told to take off her "clothes of mourning" because God is coming to liberate her children from exile. In the second reading, Paul, writing from prison, expresses his gratitude to the Philippians for helping him to spread the message of Christ. In the gospel, John the Baptist calls his hearers to repentance so that they can receive the gift of salvation offered by God through Jesus.

Now read the readings, pausing briefly after each one. Consider reading the commentary after each reading if you have not already done so.

FIRST READING: Baruch 5:1-9

God through his prophet speaks a comforting word to Jerusalem, who is mourning for her children who had been taken into exile. Jerusalem, imaged as a grieving mother, is told to remove her "mourning clothes" and replace them with "happy clothes - clothes that speak of splendor and rejoicing." Then Jerusalem is told, "to stand up upon the heights" and prepare to watch the return of the exiles that will be led home by God.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM 126

These verses express very powerfully the joy of the returning exiles

SECOND READING: Philippians 1:4-6, 8-11

Paul is writing from prison to a community, which he loves very much. In his absence, they have done a fine job of promoting the Gospel. Paul prays that they may continue to grow in love and that they "may learn to value the things that really matter."


Luke places John's call in a historical context by naming certain places and personalities. Some of these personalities will oppose Jesus and his ministry. John's call comes to him in the desert - the place where God formed and purified Israel many centuries earlier. Then John proclaims "a baptism of repentance" which will lead to forgiveness of sins. True "repentance" involves a complete change of heart, a turning away from sinful attitudes and behaviors and a turning toward God and his ways. This change of heart was symbolized by a ritual cleansing in the waters of the Jordan. The confession of sin led to a forgiveness of sin. Then John uses the words of an earlier prophet Isaiah, to challenge the people: "A herald's voice.." Commenting on these words of Isaiah, Patricia Sanchez says: "Mountains" of egoism should be leveled. "Hills" of preconceived ideas as to who and what the Savior should be and do must yield in order to welcome the unexpected surprises of God. "Crooked," "winding," and manipulating attitudes and behavior must bow to the truth of God's ways.

FAITH SHARING QUESTIONS

1. What verse, image or idea spoke to you and why?

2. In the first reading, Baruch seeks to offer the exiles a message of hope. What message might you give to people living in darkness, the people of Iraq?

3. In the second reading, Paul praises the Philippians for the ways they helped him promote the Gospel of Christ.
Name concrete ways that you individually or as a group can help in our time to promote the message of the Gospel.

4. Who are the John the Baptists in your life today? Who are those people who point you to Jesus and his ways?

RESPONDING TO THE WORD

Name one way you can act on today's readings. Suggestions: Include the poor in your Christmas shopping if you haven't already done so. Promote the Gospel by praying for missionaries; share a sacred article/book with a neighbor. Take off the "clothes of mourning" for a loss that happened some years ago.

CONCLUDE WITH PRAYERS OF PETITION AND INTERCESSION

Especially pray for conversion of heart in yourself, your home and parish. ©