

Homily – Fr. Brad Neely
2nd Sunday Advent, C, Sts Peter & Paul/Nezp Dec 06, 2009
Baruch 5: 1-9; Phil 1: 4-6, 8-11; Luke 3: 1-6

Shortly after I was ordained a priest,
my brother and I took a vacation to Arizona,
and while there, visited the Grand Canyon---
for me, the first time.
What an amazing place!
For those of you who have been there,
think about filling it all in,
so we could walk straight across it.
If we were on one side, *without Christ*,
and Christ was on the other side,
[?] would we not want to make our way to him?
We can try as we may to fill in the canyon,
shovel full by shovel full,
but only with divine help
could we get to the side that Christ is on.

The prophet Baruch,
in our first reading,
writes during the Babylonian exile,
and delivers a sublime message of hope.
Last Sunday, I mentioned an excerpt
from the Book of Daniel,
which was set during the time Israel
was under occupation by the Babylonians.

If we were under occupation ourselves,
or exiled to another place,
wouldn't we be wondering who we were, really,
and what would become of us?
In Baruch's time, he tells Jerusalem
to take off its robe of mourning,
and "put on" the splendor of God.
Israel, he says,
was "*led away on foot by their enemies,*"
but God will bring them back to Jerusalem.
Baruch says definitively that God will command
"*every lofty mountain to be made low,
and the age-old depths and gorges
be filled to level ground.*"

In other words---there will be a deletion of barriers.

The Gospel of Luke today
includes a quote from the prophet Isaiah,
who uses the same imagery as Baruch,
but from a different angle.
John the Baptist carries the role
of the one who cries out in the desert:
"*Prepare the way of the Lord,*

make straight his paths.
Every valley shall be filled,
and every mountain and hill shall be made low. . . ."
Like the prophet Baruch,
Isaiah writes in regards to the Babylonian exile.

He portrays the stance that the *nation of Israel*
involve themselves in the straightening
of pathways to the Lord.
Of course, only God can move mountains,
and fill in valleys,
but Isaiah reminds us that *we* must do our own part
to meet God on the level playing field.
Again---this is a matter of eliminating barriers
between God and humanity.

The chasm that sin forms between ourselves and God
is like a high insurmountable mountain,
or a deep wide canyon.
In this liturgical season of Advent,
we look at the fruition of God's initiative
to eliminate barriers---
that is, God taking on flesh in Christ---
uniting heaven and earth.
Christ makes level our pathway to salvation,
but even with level ground,
we must use our human freedom
to put one foot in front of the other,
and walk toward Christ.
And this divinely instituted level playing field
tells us something else very important:
everyone in the world has equal opportunity.
[?] For our part, are we properly prepared
to meet to greet the Christ child in Bethlehem?
[?] Are we properly prepared to meet Christ
when He comes again?

[?] Do we take seriously
the level pathway he has created for us,
which is safeguarded through time
by His Church?
[?] Do we respect His Church and follow her tenets,
so we don't wander off this level ground?

I was talking to the Sts Peter & Paul students this past
week about what would happen
if we knew that Christ was coming to our house?
Are we prepared when Christ knocks?
It is best not to be sprawled out on the couch,

with one leg slung over the side,
looking like a noodle,
taking a swig of Coca-Cola,
and a bag of chips in our lap.
Don't stay on the couch and yell,
"Come on in!--sit yourself down!"
Don't fling the snack bag over to Him,
"here, have some chips!"
In the course of the homily,
we came up with some much more appropriate ways
to be prepared for Christ's coming.
[He IS coming.....]

It's just my guess,
but the probability to take Christ for granted
might be pretty high.

He *has already come* in flesh,
bringing with it all that it means.
But there is something that we must never forget---
we are here today at the cost of Christ's life.
Christ died so that we may be
in right relationship with God.
In dying, Christ leveled the mountains
and filled the valleys,
so that we have a road to the heaven gates
that is possible and doable.
And while we are on this journey,
he gives us his very life to sustain us on our way.
The heavenly Father *gave* and *gives* us everything
in his son, Jesus.
In this season of Advent,
we are reminded that we are to respond in kind.