

Second Sunday of Advent 2024 C

Every night, from among my earliest memories, my father knelt down beside the bed with me to pray. The time was short, appropriate for a child – the Our Father, the Hail Mary, the Glory Be, and a few particular intentions for people and things on my mind. My mother, too, created an atmosphere of simple but regular prayer in our home ... the Advent wreath, Stations during Lent, the Rosary after supper in May and October; and my parents both sacrificed a lot to send us to Catholic schools and took us to Confession. But as a boy, it was my father taking the time to pray with me that made a profound impression. I'm sure he was tired after eight hours and more working on cars and then, after work, fixing and remodeling things at home. But night after night after night, like John the Baptist, my dad called my attention to the presence of the Lord. He invested time in giving me a relationship with God, and taught me that time for God mattered. This habit of prayer could not be passed along in an instant; only slow, steady, and patient faithfulness brings the good work God begins in us to completion.

The words of Isaiah that Luke quotes here was a promise that God would make a way for His people to come home. He was about to put an end to the exile of His people, and would lead them from Babylon back to Jerusalem, their homeland. The "Way of the Lord" Isaiah mentions is the path God would prepare for their journey ... straight, level, smooth. Yet we know that life does not always seem this way, even for people with deep faith. Sometimes the way is quite hard – disappointments, losses, conflicts, sickness, failures. Even if we stay on the path God prepares for us, life still holds suffering and difficulties. So maybe there is more to Isaiah's promise than first meets the eye.

What Isaiah could not have known clearly was that there is indeed another, related but far deeper meaning to the Way of the Lord: and we know it as the Way of the Cross. "Whoever wishes to come after Me must take up His Cross and follow Me," Jesus said to the crowds; and at the Last Supper, the evening before His death, He told the Twelve: "I am going to prepare a place for you ... so that where I am, you also may

be ... you know the way that leads where I go.” The way of trust, the way of sacrifice, the way of love ... *that is the Way of the Lord.* The way of His Cross is also the way that leads to glory, freedom, and peace; and ultimately, that is the Way that leads to our true homeland, to be with God forever. There is no hurrying through this way; only the slow, patient, daily investment of prayer, and example, and service. But on THIS journey, we are never alone, and never forgotten; for Jesus is with us, the Way, the Truth, and the Life. Like the exiles in Baruch’s day, we rejoice that we too are remembered by God.

A couple of days before my father died, I was privileged to stand by his bed at the VA Hospital and celebrate the Anointing of the Sick for him. Even though he could no longer speak or understand, the healing mercy of Jesus was there with us. At some place in the soul we do not usually access, in the desert of his memory loss and the end of his 87 years here, I think he knew that he was not alone ... the Good Shepherd was there to lead him on the final step of the Way. It was a very fitting completion to the good work my dad had done in those few minutes of prayer, day in and day out, with such patience for a child’s words to God.

Jesus has prepared the way for us. May we follow that Way ... the way of love, the way of sacrifice, the way of prayer ... with daily faithfulness. I can think of no better legacy to leave than that one day, someone might look back on some gesture of kindness and love we do, and say: “In that moment, I recognized heard the Voice of God, and I understood the Way of the Lord.”