

When I hear today's gospel I am reminded of that old joke about the new pastor in town

*A little boy was waiting for his mother to come out of the grocery store.
As he waited, he was approached by a priest who asked,
"Son, can you tell me where the Post Office is?"
The little boy replied, "Sure! Just go straight down this street a couple blocks
and turn to your right."
The man thanked the boy kindly and said,
"Son, I'm the new pastor in town. I'd like for you and mom to come to church on
Sunday.
I'll show you how to get to Heaven."
The little boy replied with a chuckle.
"Awww, come on... You don't even know how to find the way to the Post Office."*

It must have felt like that to those hearing the message of John the Baptist

Beautiful message... wonderful news...from a voice crying in the wilderness

But perhaps NOT the kind of messenger that Israel expected to see after waiting almost 1000 years for a redeemer

We have the strong figure of John the Baptist that is always described as a bit different...hair shirts...eating wild honey and locusts... perhaps looking like someone who couldn't find the post office

But one who delivered a message that changed the world !

*The winding roads shall be made straight,
and the rough ways made smooth,
and all flesh shall see the salvation of God."*

And so Advent becomes for us a season for prayer and reformation of our hearts.... of becoming ready... and being hope-filled ...for the promised coming of Jesus Christ!

... a time to reflect on our relationship with Christ, and our relationship with others in our lives.

That is why the symbols of Advent are earthy ones ...symbols that reflect the welcoming we give to a God who is about to break into our world and greet us person to person

... our symbols (such as the wreath), our songs and our decorations are only a few of the symbols that bring excitement to the season and depth to the mystery of Christ's birth

..the symbols that serve as a welcome mat to Christ Himself.

Our readings today speak of making the winding roads straight and the rough roads smooth

And they also talk about the "lowering of mountains"...the "filling of age-old depths and gorges"

..... And "making the ground level again"

Now we might wonder what these windy roads and towering mountains and deep gorges have anything to do with us.

...unless we look at them as metaphors that represent the obstacles we so often place between Christ and ourselves... between ourselves and others.

These mountains can be our Pride...or greed...or envy ... or anger

And the valleys and gorges.... could they be the areas of our lives when we have become secluded ...distant and unavailable to others

... perhaps when we fail to respond to others who need us the most

...our valleys and gorges are those things that distract us and take us off course

The season of Advent gives us a Mulligan...a do-over...a chance to re-boot ourselves

Advent is all about encouragement to make the very changes that Paul talks about in our second reading today... when he reminds us that God is not finished with any one of us yet

...we are works in progress...Gods creation ALWAYS under construction.

...and Paul is confident that the One who began a good work in US will continue to complete it.

That is a most comforting thought when we are feeling down and discouraged...and perhaps a little out of sync as Another Christmas approaches.

There is a great book by Edward Hayes called the Pilgrims Almanac and in it the author says of Advent:

"Advent is the perfect time to clear and prepare the Way. Advent is a winter training camp for those who desire peace. By reflection and prayer, by reading and meditation, we can make our hearts a place where a blessing of peace would desire to abide and where the birth of the Prince of Peace might take place."

A time to consider the life changing message of John the Baptist

Advent is that time of year to make that U turn back toward God.

...and a time to make our houses ready to receive Christ and meet God up close and personal

God Bless