

Homily for December 10, 2000
2nd Sunday of Advent Cycle C

By Father Charles Bowes

Baruch 5:1-9
Philippians 1:4-6, 8-11
Luke 3:1-6

God comes in our desert of struggle and unloving choice

A story is told about a man who caused quite a commotion among the shoppers at a mall. Many dismissed him as an annoying nut, some found him an eccentric “hoot.” He was dressed in a tattered flannel shirt and jeans. No one knew where he spent the night, but he was seen rummaging around the dumpsters for scraps of food from Orange Julius and McDonald’s. Everyday he could be found by the beautifully lighted fountain near the mall’s food court. Despite his ragged appearance and that slightly “off” look in his eyes, there was a kindness and sincerity that drew people to him.

He would ask them why they would spend so much money for Christmas, why they would allow themselves to become so obsessed and stressed out over this tinsel holiday. “We like our Christmas with a lot of sugar, don’t we?” he would tease. But Christmas is about hope and love, he said – and that can be a struggle. Give gifts of kindness and compassion to each

other. Seek forgiveness and reconciliation from family and friends who may be lost to you. Let the spirit of the Christ Child embrace every season of the year, not just December, he would say.

Those who listened would nod in agreement as he spoke – even as they tightened their grips on their shopping bags. Some were moved to quit shopping and go home to be with their families, others would go off and buy an extra toy or piece of clothing for charity; a few would even be moved to escape to a church or chapel for quiet prayer.

Sometimes he would rail against the insipid music and the gaudy decorations. When the mall Santa would walk by, he would make fun of him, asking the embarrassed Santa pointed questions about the *real* Christmas story.

Soon, though, the store owners had had enough of his distractions. The mall managers had security escort him from the premises. He wasn’t really hurting anyone, they realized. But he had to go, they said. He was ruining everyone’s Christmas.

If Saint John the Baptizer appeared in our time and place, maybe this is where he would go, how he would look, and what he would say. John, the Advent prophet, proclaims that the real Christmas event: the coming of the Christ – in the future, in the present, as

well as in the past. John would proclaim that Christmas isn't just a trip down memory lane, an exercise in nostalgia – rather, it is about the future coming of God and the present invasion of God. Yes, the Baptizer would call us to realize God's present of presence among us, a presence that we are often too busy or too jaded or too overwhelmed to realize. We meet this God, this Jesus the symbol of God, in the desert of our lives – in our naming and claiming of unloving choices and struggles.

That's the reason for our Advent reconciliation service this coming Tuesday evening at 7:00 p.m. – an opportunity to name and claim not just the sin, the unloving choices, but the struggles – those events which we experience as our prison, our brokenness, our overwhelming sore.

Recently Archbishop Pilarczyk recommended that we Catholics celebrate the reconciliation sacrament of reconciliation at least seasonally, twice a year – Advent and Lent – that we enter our deserts and there meet our God precisely where we are most vulnerable – for there God can be God to us and we can be God's children. After all, this enfleshment, this incarnation, is God's doing wherein “Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low.” It is God's doing – God's deed that “the winding roads shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth, and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.”

The good Lord does so want to invade our hearts, that we become what we receive here – the Body of Christ for the world we touch.

God comes in our desert of struggle
and unloving choice.