



ADVENT 2 B
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Intentionality: we need to intentionally encourage spiritual life.

People want to feel closer to God; they desire the nearness of God. The Holy Spirit gave to Solomon this wisdom:

[God] has put eternity into man's heart, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end. (Ecc 3:11)

Yes, God has made us for himself. He has given us an innate curiosity about himself. But by human efforts we can get only so close; given the fact that we are sinners, God only allows us so close. God is holy, he is different than anything we can experience empirically, through rational inquiry.

Last Sunday's reading from Isaiah makes my point well. Isaiah 64:1 ff. was a prayer for the nearness of God—it recalled *the good old days*, the Exodus, the time when God trained his people, feeding them the bread of heaven, as *a daily* bread. These were the days that when they sinned, they knew God's swift and certain rebuke. They were nostalgic for these days, when they felt God's nearness—just as I was nostalgic about my mom's wooden spoon! Intentionally (by means of daily bread from heaven) God encouraged Israel's dependence upon himself, upon his benevolent nature.

People still want to feel close to God. David Lose hears preachers complaining about those who claim to be "spiritual, but who are not religious." He then asks the preachers what are they doing about those "religious, who are not spiritual," whose faith does not touch daily life? —who, in their daily lives do not live *the faith* because they don't practice *their religion*?

People want to feel the nearness of God. They want something to believe in. But they don't pray; they don't make time for personal scripture reading; they absent themselves from worship and the sacramental life; and what of putting faith into practice by feeding the poor, visiting the sick, etc (Mt 25)?

We want to feel the nearness of God. We want their faith to give life purpose and meaning. But if you're having trouble making the connection between faith and daily existence, perhaps you want to check the connection between the Word, your prayers, and your daily walk with God.

More than one writer has noticed that “our post-Christian culture” less and less identifies with the biblical story. As a child when we heard the Law that said, “*Thou shalt not steal,*” you and I had in our minds the story of Achan who stole some devotional items from Ai bringing sin to the whole community of Israel. Achan and his whole clan were dealt with swiftly.

In the same manner we learned about adultery by means of David and Bathsheba. And, Judas was the epitome of a traitor long before Benedict Arnold. Long before Ebenezer Scrooge and A Christmas Carol, there was the chilling account Ananias and Sapphira (Ac 5). In a post-Christian culture the Bible is no longer the source of the stuff that informs our children’s daily existence. My friend Tony uses terms like “*post-Christian culture*” because it honestly describes the times in which we live.

- My childhood saw a Christmas tree in the town square.
- It assumed we know the Ten Commandments and that we shared a morality shaped by the Bible.
- But ours is now a world in which we have a “holiday tree.” Okay, I can live with that, but have you ever wondered about whether or not to wish someone a merry Christmas, lest you offend them?
- In our preschool we used to assume that children knew the basic melodies to most Christmas carols: the teachers had something upon which they could build. No more. One of the programs offered by the providers of our educational materials gave us a program with three or four cute songs all sung to “Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star.” Yeach!

You’ll be happy to know that they rebelled. We/ they have added Christmas carols. But this means that we are deliberately teaching them “Away In A Manger” from the beginning. We have to teach them to fold their hands; what a Bible is; and even explain God. You and I can no longer assume anything.

We must intentionally teach the Faith to our children; we all must be much more intentional in modeling and living our obedience to Jesus Christ. Rev. Lose says it’s not uncommon to find people looking for spiritual help on the internet and talking about their experiences with strangers and friends on Facebook. He notes that they turn to book clubs and yoga groups for a spiritual dimension.

A timely message is embodied by John the Baptist. As long as we can hear him “it’s not too late.” Advent is a season of preparation; it is “about endings and beginnings,” says Walter Wangerin. He suggests that our beginnings should be ***intentional new beginnings***, for our own sakes and for the sake of those around us. Perhaps people want to know about Jesus—people who claim they are spiritual

but haven't the foggiest idea what it means to be such.

When John the Baptist shouts "Repent," he is *in fact* telling you to make an end and begin anew—is he not? Is that not the expectation? Those who journeyed all the way from Jerusalem to hear John in the wilderness, didn't they expect him to tell them (show them) how they should live life differently – more productively -better -more spiritually? They sure did!

John shows us God's way. Their hopes lay in the One to whom John is always pointing. Jesus Christ. God's beloved Son is our new beginning. Jesus is the new beginning. The one whom John the Apostle called the Alpha and the Omega, is in fact also the end, our end and our beginning. In him we find our new life. Jesus is God's beginning for us. In Christ we are *re-created*; born anew. He who created us from Adam, regenerates us in his Son, Jesus Christ.

"If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation (creature), the old has gone and the new has come." (2 Cor. 5:17)

Do you want to feel closer to Go? Then take your place in the story and live the life to which the Spirit calls you. You can make the beginning of Mark's presentation of the Gospel the beginning of your own life in Christ. You can resolve (as if it were new year's) to walk with Jesus this year from birth to baptism, from the wilderness to the cross, from the resurrection to his return in glory. You can live the Christ-life.

Galatians 5:9

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