

The Coming of Our God

In this season of Advent we await the coming of Christ. We begin somewhat in the position of the Jews in today's first reading and responsorial psalm—we begin in exile, distant, alienated even estranged from our God. For in self-absorption we create chasms between one another. In our pride we place ourselves high above others and in our fear we build walls to defend ourselves from each other. But as Baruch proclaims to the Jews in Babylon, our God is coming to fill the valleys that divide us, Our God is coming to lay low the lofty mountains that isolate us. Our God is coming to build us a road, straight and level, from me to you, from us to him.

John proclaims the same words but with a different twist. For John it is **our** task to fill the valleys and level the mountains lying between us and God. For John it is our task to build the road back home. It reminds me of a story told by a Jesuit friend of mine who always sprinkles little stories into his homilies. This one is about a kid whose teacher had assigned him to write a letter to God. He wrote "Dear God, I am doing the best I can. Frankie."

Surely both are true. God builds a road to us as we build a road to God. For our separation from God is not a literal distance between us, he is right here in front of our nose, before our eyes. Where else could he be? But we get too distracted, or too busy, or too irritable to notice what is right under our feet, or be mindful about what we are doing right here, right now. God can be difficult to see and hard to hear, not because he is so far removed from us, but because he is so close, not so rare but so familiar that we take his presence for granted. Like the air we breathe. Or the ground beneath our feet. Another Jesuit, on the short side, told me yesterday that he tells people he is just the right height—his legs just long enough for his feet to reach the ground.

I am also reminded of a Jewish folktale, told to me by yet another Jesuit, which I have surely told you before—but hopefully you've forgotten it. An old Rabbi, my age, was having dinner with a new family from his synagogue. At table the Rabbi turned to their little son sitting beside him and says, "I will give you a gold coin if you can tell me where God can be found." Without missing a beat, the boy turns to the Rabbi and replies, "And I will give you two gold coins if you can tell me where God can't be found!"

“I am sure of this much,” writes Paul, “that he who has begun the good work in you will carry it through to completion.” As the days darken this Advent season may we light a candle and put it in the window-sill of our own hearts to welcome indoors, family and friend, neighbor and stranger. Sin may indeed abound, but grace ever super-abounds. casting a light that scatters whatever shadows may loom. May our own faith in God, and our hope in one another cause our love to abound more and more that the Word of God might take flesh once more this Christmas right here in this church, to our right and to our left, behind us and before us, above our heads and beneath our feet.