

2nd Sunday Advent Year "C"

December 4-5, 2021 | Cathedral of Saint Paul

Readings: Baruch 5:1-9; Phil. 1:4-6, 8-11; Luke 3:1-6

Only once in the entire three-year Sunday lectionary cycle, do we hear from Baruch, scribe to the prophet Jeremiah. This Book was written while the people of Israel were in exile, far from home. Babylon was due east of Jerusalem, and the poet here envisions God leading the exiles back across the desert. Jerusalem is personified here. Look to the East, look and see what is happening. Look to the road laid out in the desert, Jerusalem is told, for that road will be filled with those coming home.

This book presents vignettes from the history of the exile and reflections of that history to Jews. The main point for our reflection concerns how the New Jerusalem is described. The Jerusalem to be restored is not the Jerusalem of the exile, but the New Jerusalem of the end time. It is a vision of a new beginning. Someone **dared to believe** in a better future. But what about today? What is our current situation? What is our vision?

Can we see signs on the horizon that cause us concern? Our capital city has just recorded its 35th homicide in 2021, the most in its history. It is a far cry from the settlement on the banks of the Mississippi River, when in 1841, Fr. Lucien Galtier built a log chapel in honor of Saint Paul. He prevailed upon the 16 families living there to change the name from Pig's Eye! Do we dare to believe in a better future for the city we love?

The U.S. Supreme Court heard oral arguments last week in a landmark Mississippi Law that sought to limit abortion availability beyond the 15th week of pregnancy.¹ If the law is allowed to stand, its effect will be far greater than in the approximately 200 cases directly impacted by this state law. Its effect is far great of course because if the justices allow some or all of the 15-week Mississippi law to stand, that could directly affect as much of half of the country, in various state laws in our republic.

¹ Statistically, 90% of all abortions in this country occur in the first 13 weeks of pregnancy

Do we dare to believe that someday the Federal Judiciary will reverse the 49-year-old *Roe v. Wade*, just as in 1954, *Brown v. Board of Education* struck down *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) from 58 years prior that paved the way for “separate but equal” mistreatment of African Americans? The Dobbs case could well be one of the most consequential decisions in recent history. Do we dare to believe in a better future for unborn babies?

A fifteen-year-old boy leaves a trail of tears and devastated families in a suburban Detroit school, having shown clear signs of being deeply disturbed even hours before his rampage. Do we dare to believe in the day when our children attend school, freed from the fear of the unspeakable?

The people in Baruch’s day had the foresight to envision a new Jerusalem, coming from the East. We Christians interpret these verses in a messianic sense—Jerusalem will rise from the ashes, look to the East. Jesus Christ is the light from the East. Splendor will be restored to the ancient city.

In this context, splendor seems to be the effect of God’s saving presence on Israel. The implication is that Israel’s neighbors will see the glorious and resplendent salvation that God will bring to Israel. “The light of his glory,” referenced at the end of the reading again paints a visual image of God accompanying the returning exiles.

It is time for us to stand tall, to speak clearly and with charity. We must work tirelessly for the protection of innocent life in the womb, offering assistance to women so that they do not make a tragic choice. We must advocate for the safety and security of our communities, truly seeking to be agents of peace, so that, in the words of Baruch, our families and communities may truly “advance secure in the glory of God.”

We need people of vision, as in the time of Baruch to see a future better than the present. May the Lord awaken in each of us a spiritual hunger for what is authentically Christian and motivate us to a greater sense of witnessing to our faith in our daily lives.

The season of Advent beckons us to look ahead, to look to the East, from where our salvation comes. St. Paul assures us that the good work begun in us will be brought to fulfillment and completion, right up to the day of Christ Jesus.

If we are to make ready the way of the Lord, let us clear the brambles, the weeds, the trash and the refuse, anything which blocks his way. We do all this in the strong and firm hope that our Savior comes to conquer sin and death, who comes as the light of the world into our midst to transform us into his likeness.