



SAINT MARGARET  
PARISH

2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Advent

Cycle B

Rev. Mr. Steven Roth

“Promise”

One day, a 2<sup>nd</sup> grader asked his teacher, “How did God make Christmas trees?” The teacher answered by explaining that at the beginning of the world, one day God created oak trees,

maple trees and pine trees. As night drew near, God told the trees to stay awake all night and watch over the forest. They all agreed to do so. However, soon after, the oak tree fell asleep. A few hours later the maple tree dozed off. Morning came and God found that the pine trees were the only ones still awake. God then said to the pine trees, “Because you stayed awake, I will make you different from every other tree. You shall be given the gift of remaining green forever. When the other trees lose their leaves and sleep all winter, you will be a sign of hope... even in the coldest nights of winter, covered with snow and ice, you will be evergreen.”

For us, as Catholic believers in this Advent season, the Church invites us not to look at trees for hope but rather to reflect on finding hope in God. And the person giving us an answer is not a 2<sup>nd</sup> grade teacher but rather Isaiah, Peter and Mark, authors of our Scripture readings we just heard.

Isaiah speaks to us in a time when the Israelites were absolutely frustrated. They were exiled from their homeland and had lost everything. Every Israelite had been touched by oppression, having memories of their loved ones’ blood shed in the city streets. Most of all, they were apart from their temple. Being removed from their temple was significant because there were not several temples...there was one temple where they believed God dwelt. It was not an option to build another one. Instead, they were forced to wrestle with feeling they had lost everything, even their connection to God. In this context, Isaiah speaks to his people, comfort, give comfort to my people. Isaiah goes on in wonderful, rich, poetic imagery telling the people that things will get better and to hope in the Lord.

In Mark's gospel we hear these same words of hope repeated by John the Baptist. He too proclaims a message of hope in God. The Lord is coming! Get ready! Be prepared! Every mountain shall be leveled, every valley filled in! Salvation is coming.

And again, the words of Isaiah, repeated by John the Baptist are now repeated for us. Do these words bring us hope? How do we know that we should hope in God in our own lives? In our moments where we feel exiled from our promised land? Exiled from feeling close to God. Exiled from feeling content at home or school. Exiled from feeling peace or meaning in our life. How do we know that we should hope in God?

Because, God is a God of promise. God promised He would come to His people and He did. That is why we celebrate December 25<sup>th</sup>....God coming to His people. This same God, who fulfilled His promise, promised us that He will come again. On that day, all will be made right. And so we hope. Hope in a God we can count on and believe in.

This same God speaks to us and offers us hope, every time we gather as Catholics to hear His Word in Scripture and to eat His Body and Blood. It is in these moments that the Lord speaks most clearly. In these moments we encounter, far above all else, a God of hope and a God of promise.

But when will these hopes, when will this promise happen? If only we needed to stay awake just one night like the oak and the maple and pine trees. Instead it seems like the morning sun will never rise as we stand freezing in the dark of our lives. Holding on in the midst of the pain and struggles we experience in our lives. When will our hopes be fulfilled? I think it best to allow Peter's second reading to have the last words. "The Lord does not delay in His promise. In the Lord's eyes one day is as a thousand years and a thousand years as one day."