

2nd Sunday of Advent

Cycle B

December 4, 2011

Saint Margaret Parish, Bel Air

Breaking News!

Today, when we watch news shows or news channels on TV, we often see the words *Breaking News* on the screen.

Breaking News appears when a story has just happened or is happening even as it is being reported. So, last spring, we saw *Breaking News* when President Mubarak of Egypt was forced to resign.

This week, we saw *Breaking News* when our Federal Reserve and five other central banks intervened to alleviate the debt crisis in Europe. This evening, if we have not been watching the football game late this afternoon, we hope to see *Breaking News* telling us about the Ravens win over the Browns.

Breaking News is meant to grab our attention away from anything else. It means that something important is happening right now and we don't want to miss it.

Mark's News

This image helps us to appreciate today's gospel.

Mark starts off: "*The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ...*" The word "*gospel*" that Mark uses means proclamation.

It is the same word that civil rulers used back then when they had something important to "*proclaim*" to the people. Mark in effect is saying, "*This is the proclamation of Jesus Christ, the Son of God...*"

So, right in the first sentence, Mark explains why there is a "proclamation" about this ordinary man from Nazareth – why he is *Breaking News*. There is a "proclamation" about Jesus because he is the "*Son of God*."

This means that God has entered our world in the person of Jesus and shares our humanity. This is the *Breaking News* of who Jesus of Nazareth really is and it forms the very first sentence of Mark's gospel.

More News: John and Jesus

Then, right after telling us this, Mark gives us some background – kind of like the next 30 seconds worth about the *Breaking News*.

Mark tells us that a man named John the Baptist is to introduce this Jesus to the world and he says John tells us something about Jesus even by his lifestyle. So, Mark says that John's diet consists of locusts and honey – not my idea of a good meal!

Mark recalls these foods because each of them tells us something about Jesus. In the Old Testament, God sends a plague of locusts to punish the evil pharaoh in Egypt – in other words, to uproot or destroy evil.

And so, John's eating locusts tells us that Jesus comes to destroy evil. In today's first reading, Isaiah gives us some beautiful images – the images of leveling mountains and filling in valleys and smoothing rough roads.

These images are not to be taken literally. In other words, we are not literally going to do these things to prepare for the Savior's coming.

Instead, these images point to areas of evil or sin that we need to address. For example, we are to "*level the mountains*" of busyness and preoccupation with so many things that get in the way of some reflective prayer or prayerful reflection and our entire relationship with God.

We are to "*fill in the valleys*" of human need wherever we see it, whether in a grieving neighbor who needs companionship or a homeless person who needs a bed. And we are to "*smooth out the rough roads*" of relationships by patiently and respectfully trying to work through misunderstandings or hurts.

So, the locusts in John's diet are symbolic – they call us to deal with any area of evil or sin in our lives. Then, throughout the Bible, honey is a symbol of God's special care for us.

The honey that John eats looks back to Isaiah's words today, "*Comfort, give comfort to my people.*" Jesus, whom John is introducing, gives us the comfort of God's presence.

Jesus gives us an inner peace and hope. He brings us comfort, but still we have to open our hearts and level those mountains and fill in those valleys and smooth those rough spots that can keep the Lord away from us.

Conclusion

So, we have a wonderful proclamation or *Breaking News* here at the beginning of Mark's gospel today.

Mark does not want us to miss this – that Jesus is the Son of God and that he is here with us. And he wants us to do all we can to allow Jesus to be with us as fully as possible.