

ADVENT SUNDAY II “B”

DECEMBER 6/7, 2014

My travels home over the spring, summer and early fall to assist my mother as she prepared to transition into an assisted living facility found me traveling Interstate 35 both north and south. During this time a six mile stretch of the southbound lanes of the interstate in Hamilton County were closed for reconstruction. Traveling this route I witnessed its renewal over the course of the months I frequently traveled it. Over the years the roadway had become worn due to the wear and tear of the volume of traffic it bore, age and the effects of the extremes of the Iowa climate. Parts had experienced temporary repairs, but the time had come to completely renew this stretch of road. The former concrete roadway was broken up, the roadbed re-graded, and an entirely new surface laid down. Travelling it over the recent Thanksgiving holiday was a joy! Once again this stretch of road is broad and smooth and can fulfill its purpose for those who use it for commerce or leisure. Once again it is a means of reaching a destination safely.

Both John the Baptist and the prophet known as Second Isaiah speak about preparing a “highway for God”. The metaphor of the highway for both John the Baptist and Isaiah is a call for conversion, metanoia, turning around, undergoing reconstruction, renewal, of our hearts so that God’s life, particularly made present in the birth and life of Jesus while here on earth and now through the presence of the Holy Spirit received in baptism and confirmation dwelling within us, may more clearly be manifest in and through us. We are God’s highway! We are the road over which God wishes to travel into the lives of people and the events of our world! We are called by our baptism and confirmation as the “way” on which others can travel and journey with us into union with God and experience God’s gift of eternal life. This is our vocation! Like Isaiah, like John the Baptist we are to “prepare the way of the Lord” not just during these four weeks of Advent, but each day of our lives.

Like the stretch of Interstate 35, however, in the course of our daily lives with its many responsibilities and burdens, that original construction of God’s way in our life can

get beaten down, become rough and uneven, and while not totally (for most of us) unsuitable for travel for the Holy Spirit, ourselves or others, it can become worn. Isaiah and John the Baptist invite us to allow God to “reconstruct” us so that we can not only have the means of a straight, smooth way for God to come and encounter us, but that our lives can also be a straight, smooth and sure way for others to travel to God and God to them.

Ritually, this process of divine reconstruction for us as Church is found in through the Sacrament of Reconciliation/Penance/Confession. In the Sacrament of Reconciliation God, the master highway builder reconstructs our hearts and lives, offering us comfort, consolation, and, yes, also challenge, but not a challenge of condemnation but one to greater growth, greater love, with patience and tenderness, “not wishing that any should perish.” Through the ministry of the priest, God comes **not to judge us** with harshness, but to **heal and renew us**, removing the worn, cracked and uneven highway of our lives with the newness of his forgiving love.

What shape is each of our faith highway in? Have time and the routines of daily life deteriorated its surface? Have we attempted temporary “patches” as a means to “buy a little time” until I can get around to “fixing it” only to find that now they, too, are no longer viable? Has the time come to have God rip-up the roadbed of our life; re-grade the rough places; lay down a completely new surface? How long has it been since I last celebrated the Sacrament of Reconciliation? Is it time to contract with God to reconstruct/renew his way in my life? The Second Sunday of Advent invites us to post a “Road Work Ahead” sign in our hearts and present ourselves to him in the Sacrament of Reconciliation—renewing our commitment to daily prayer; our commitment to manifest faith and love for him through daily acts of love, forgiveness, compassion and justice for the members of our family, one another as members of our parish, and the wider community; acts of justice for the voiceless in society and the world.

Come, let us prepare a highway for our God!