

ADVENT II “C”
DECEMBER 8/9, 2018

Last weekend I used the image of the “refresh” button on our electronic devices as a metaphor of a way to enter into these weeks of preparation for a renewed birth of our relationship with Jesus at Christmas. This week I’d like to continue with another technological metaphor.

Occasionally our devices stop working, “freeze up” as the saying goes. The solution: shut them down and “reboot”. Our spiritual lives can also “freeze up.” This weekend’s Scriptures are Advent’s “reboot”.

In the first reading the Prophet Baruch is writing to his fellow countrymen who have experienced “freezing up.” Baruch, a disciple and secretary of the prophet Jeremiah who we heard from last weekend, writes at the same time as his mentor Jeremiah. It is the time of the great exile of the Kingdom of Judah to Babylon in the sixth century before the birth of Jesus. The Northern Kingdom of Israel was taken captive to Assyria about a century before. The last vestiges of the Davidic Kingdom have disappeared. Analogously it would be like our whole Constitutional form of government collapsing under invasion of a foreign power and that government putting in place its own system and imprisoning or executing all our government leaders. In the midst of the people’s despair over the punishment that has come upon them due to their lack of fidelity to the covenant between God and them, Baruch offers a message of hope. God’s anger Baruch proclaims, is not the final answer. God, despite Israel’s sin, cannot, will not, forget his covenant love for his people. God is about to “Reboot” his covenant promise. Israel will once again experience the love, compassion, and glory of God.

What Baruch prophesied, the Gospel portrays is the message John the Baptizer is given by God to proclaim. “Reboot”! No, he doesn’t use that term! But John’s “Repent” carries the same meaning. Too often the word “Repent” conjures up negative images of a Catholic “guilt trip”, of trembling fear before an angry punishing God, of harsh penitential practices, of “three strikes and you’re out” divine judgment. All of these are far from the truth. While repenting does involve acknowledging personal responsibility for sin, and of entering into a lifestyle

exhibiting a “firm purpose of amendment” to sincerely strive to avoid sin in general and specific sins in particular in our following of Jesus, through some form of concrete “penance” (a change of attitude and action) which exhibits our resolve, “Repent” is a message of mercy. You may recall during the Year of Mercy I proposed a definition of mercy as: “Love’s response to suffering.” Repent: Reboot, is God’s call and promise of mercy, restoration, of new or renewed life, the same promise given by Baruch in the first reading which God wishes to extend to each and all of us.

In a daily homily a couple of years ago reflecting on the the person and life of King David, Pope Francis noted in reviewing King David’s checkered life, ***“There is no saint without a past nor sinner without a future.”*** This statement has been a source of great comfort and consolation to me in my walk with Jesus. It is the promise of “repent”. It is the truth of allowing God’s mercy “rebooting” us.

The Sacrament of Reconciliation/Penance is the means Jesus has given to the Church to “reboot” our spiritual life. If you find that your spiritual life “locked up” or your spiritual system has “crashed” I encourage you to allow God to “reboot” you through this sacrament. Don’t let fear keep you away. I’ve had people say to me, “Father, not even God can forgive what I’ve done.” No, no. That is the devil speaking. There is no sin beyond God’s desire to forgive, of God’s desire to “reboot” his relationship with you! Remember please: ***“There is no saint without a past nor sinner without a future.”*** As I’ve also stated over and over, it doesn’t matter how long it’s been. Israel was in exile for fifty years, so don’t worry about how long its been. God desires to “lead you in joy by the light of his glory with his mercy and justice for company” (Bar. 5:9).

Repent! Reboot!