

Homily – Dec 5, 2021

By Fr. Virgil Petermeier, osc

We celebrate this important season of Advent so that despair and pessimism do not conquer us, but rather that we become ever stronger in our belief and hope in God. Sometimes we do give into pessimism and focus only on bad news. So we come to our compassionate God, calling out . . . Have Mercy!

HOMILY:

John the Baptist cried out in the desert, "Prepare the way of the Lord. Every valley shall be filled in, every mountain and hill made low, and every winding path straight . . . and all flesh shall see the salvation of God."

In light of John's inviting people to repentance, we can understand deserts, the valleys, mountains, hills and winding paths as metaphors or images of elements in our life. The purpose of filling the valleys and lowering the mountains and hills is so that "**all flesh shall see the salvation of God.**" Therefore, we can say that the valleys and winding ways, as well as mountains and hills, symbolize elements in our life that block us from seeing God's salvation or hinder us from cooperating with God's salvation.

From reading newspapers and watching the news on TV, we get the clear impression that anger seems to cause valleys and mountains and crooked ways. Anger causes deep valleys of grief when a student kills other students as once again happened recently in Detroit. Such a shooting causes mountains of trauma.

In the past year, more than 130 angry and hateful drivers rammed into crowds killing some and injuring many. It seems as if they presume they have a right to show their anger in any way they want. This is indeed a crooked path.

At this time many medical personnel are feeling mountains of exhaustion trying to attend to so many Covid patients, and find themselves in a wasteland of frustration due to many young people dying unnecessarily because they refuse vaccination.

Many families experience a desert or wasteland of domestic tension, joblessness and addiction. Or some of us founder on the crooked ways of not forgiving and not reconciling with one another – between spouses or between parents and children.

These are only a few of the major problems our world is facing. I haven't yet mentioned the different wars going on around the world. Floods and fires becoming more frequent and water becoming scarcer due to global warming. That's a mountainous problem for us here in Arizona.

In the midst of such a desert full of problems, John the Baptist asks us to prepare the way. But with so many steep valleys we may feel that our world is too hopeless and too-complicated to ever improve. Some people feel that way about our polarized society and church. But this is exactly why the Church invites us to experience Advent—a time to wake up our hope and excitement about a new world in the making by God. The kingdom of God is near.

While we deal with problems, we must simultaneously look for and celebrate those elements which give us hope. And that is why these past two years we have placed budding amaryllis bulbs in our sanctuary. They are strong symbols of God's power to bring new life. You see this bulb has no roots, no water except its own natural moisture inside. Most of us would say, "That bulb won't make – it won't bloom without water and direct sunshine." Moreover, they are waxed and painted gold.

Contrary to our disbelief, last year we witnessed big red trumpet blossoms appearing around Christmas Day. What happened last year can stir our hope that these flowers, too, will continue growing taller and finally produce beautiful red blossoms this year.

We must focus on other amaryllis-type examples of hope. For instance, we see severely handicapped people growing into generous contributors to society. We've witnessed severely-sick Covid patients, recovering, like our sister in Christ, Linda. There is hope. God's love is powerful.

So, let's help the angry persons manage their anger appropriately. Let us encourage people to be vaccinated. Let us encourage helpful dialog so that we can understand one another better and create a society and church united for the true good of one another.

Let us listen to and obey John the Baptist, "Prepare the way of the Lord . . . so that all living beings may see and enjoy God's salvation, and experience God's new world coming about."