

DECEMBER 9, 2018

Second Sunday of Advent

Reading 1 BAR 5:1-9

Jerusalem, take off your robe of mourning and misery;
put on the splendor of glory from God forever:
wrapped in the cloak of justice from God,
bear on your head the mitre
that displays the glory of the eternal name.
For God will show all the earth your splendor:
you will be named by God forever
the peace of justice, the glory of God's worship.
Up, Jerusalem! stand upon the heights;
look to the east and see your children
gathered from the east and the west
at the word of the Holy One,
rejoicing that they are remembered by God.
Led away on foot by their enemies they left you:
but God will bring them back to you
borne aloft in glory as on royal thrones.
For God has commanded
that every lofty mountain be made low,
and that the age-old depths and gorges
be filled to level ground,
that Israel may advance secure in the glory of God.
The forests and every fragrant kind of tree
have overshadowed Israel at God's command;
for God is leading Israel in joy
by the light of his glory,
with his mercy and justice for company..

Responsorial Psalm PS 126:1-2, 2-3, 4-5, 6.

R. (3) **The Lord has done great things for us; we are filled with joy.**

Reading 2 PHIL 1:4-6, 8-11

Gospel LK 3:1-6

HOMILY:

After his triumphs of *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939) and *East of Eden* (1952), in the same the year that he won the 1962 Nobel Prize for Literature, the chronicler of America John Steinbeck seemed to have arrived at a midlife crisis of a loss in the wonder of the subject of his writing: America and its people. He wrote at the beginning of his work *Travels With Charley*, "I discovered that I did not know my own country. I, an American writer, writing about America, was working from memory. . . . In short, I was writing of something I did know about, and it seems to me that in a so-called writer this is criminal (5)." To atone for this "crime," Steinbeck took his dog Charley, filled his truck with supplies, and headed out from New York across our nation to rediscover his wonder for the land that had always been the inspiration for his life's work. When describing his travels in New England, he wrote:

At intervals I drove . . . off the road and let Charley out to smell over the register of previous guests. Then I would heat my coffee and sit comfortably on my back step and contemplate wood and water and the quick-rising mountains with crowns of conifers and the fir trees high up, dusted with snow. . . . In Salinas, California, where I grew up, although we had some frost the climate was cool and foggy. When we saw colored pictures of a Vermont autumn forest it was another fairy thing and we frankly didn't believe it. In school we memorized "Snowbound" and little poems about Old Jack Frost and his paintbrush, but the only thing Jack Frost did for us was put a thin skin of ice on the watering trough, and that rarely. To find not only that this bedlam of color was true but that the pictures were pale and inaccurate translations, was to me startling. I can't even imagine the forest colors when I am not seeing them. I wondered whether constant association could cause inattention, and asked a native New Hampshire woman about it. She said the autumn never failed to amaze her; to elate. "It is a glory," she said, "and can't be remembered, so that it always comes as a surprise.

In the loss of wonder that Steinbeck had experienced, he discovered it was not the case of having merely forgotten it. It was rather that wonder fades on its own and needs renewal.

Steinbeck, speaking about his loss of wonder for America, discovered something more basic: the fleeting experience of **GLORY**—that breathtaking experience of beauty and transcendence that leaves us in awe and speechless: the first view of the Grand Canyon; the first glimpse of a grandchild; the first hearing of a Beethoven Symphony; the first glimpse by a child of a Christmas tree on Christmas morning after the arrival of St. Nick. Glory cannot not be remembered, for, in one's memory, or in a photo, glory fades and loses its shimmer. Christmas is that great inbreaking of God's Glory. The Word made flesh, the Glory of God, must be renewed in us over and over again—the very reason we return again and again to this Eucharistic altar.

Last week, from the gospel of Luke, Jesus spoke to us of life's trials and tribulations, too often a source of fear and confusion that result in a loss in the wonder of the gift of life. Into that all-too-common experience, we trust in an inbreaking of Glory, God with us. The prophet Baruch today speaks to that universal longing of each human heart when he says: "O Jerusalem, take off your robe of mourning and misery; put on the splendor of glory from God forever: wrapped in the cloak of justice from God, bear on your head the mitre that displays the glory of the eternal name. For God will show all the earth your splendor: you will be named by God forever the peace of justice, the glory of God's worship." When, as the poet William Wordsworth remarked, "the world is too much with us," we believe with a sure and certain faith that Glory awaits a new in-breaking, if we can but raise up our heads and hearts and see that Glory reappearing.

We have set our course this Advent to "rise up to Glory." So... does life feel heavy, lifeless, lacking or listless? God's life, His very Glory, awaits us to restore us. Let us return and rise up to the Glory that always and only can be experienced when it is new. When we "do this in memory of Him," and discover anew He who is the Glory for which we were created. When life's wonder fades, may we each experience in the Eucharist God's Glory anew, just as Jesus promised.