

The day before I was ordained, I received a gift that has been very helpful - especially in the past few months of itinerant ministry. It was a GPS; more specifically - a Garmin nüvi 200-series. All I need do to find a parish is punch in the address, and the GPS tells me in a computer voice how to get to wherever I need to go.

It's really a nice thing to have; and I often find myself using it to go places I already know how to get to. Partially because it shows the speed limit on the screen, and puts my speed right next to it - just in case I miss a speed zone. And also, because it lets me know an approximate time when I will arrive at my destination.

One thing I've noticed, is that when I first program a location into the GPS, it show on the screen a distance to a particular destination. For instance, it tells me that I'm about 80 miles from my parents home. But when I choose a destination, the GPS begins to calculate the route; and a new distance pops up which is usually longer than what it first said. In the particular case of my folk's place - the revised distance is about 120 miles.

The first number, I've determined, is what might be called the distance "as the crow flies." That is, if I could just go off-road into four-wheel drive and point my truck at mom and dad's place - it would be a much shorter distance. But, because the most ... realistic ... polite ... civilized ... way to drive is to do it on roads and highways - I end up with another 40 or more miles.

In today's first reading, we hear again from the prophet Isaiah. In the part of that book leading up to this reading, the prophet cautions Israel and their king not to enter into certain alliances and to listen to God's plan. And of course they didn't do that.

The end result was that Israel was made a vassal state of Assyria, and now Jerusalem has been taken over by the Babylonians.

The people are disturbed, and the worry is that they've messed things up beyond repair.

The bottom line of today's prophecy is that God will restore things. The prophet speaks of comfort - but also of some adjustments that need to be made ... flattening mountains, filling in valleys, straightening paths.

And in the Gospel we hear of John the Baptist - and the words of the prophet Isaiah are repeated to us:

*Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths.*

As we live out our lives, we have good days and bad days ... or good years and bad years. We are often blessed to live according to God's plan, and other times we end up doing our own thing - which may or may not be according to God's plan.

And through all the twists and turns of life, we find ourselves in the here-and-now ... and here ... and ... now ... today.

In a certain way, our lives are a bit like programming and operating a GPS.

While we have a built-in desire for God - St. Augustine speaks of a hole in our hearts that can only be filled by God.

We are born ... many of us were baptized as infants ... we move through life ... doing what seems right at the time ... often taking various twists and turns ... and then here we are.

The Season of Advent gives us the opportunity to ask “how did we get here?” And we can re-assess our relationship to God; and re-set our spiritual GPS and re-direct our hearts toward Jesus Christ.

All those twists and turns may often make our journey longer - and perhaps more difficult.

But we can take comfort from the fact that no matter what we do or where we go - God always has a plan for us.

In today’s liturgy, and as we prepare to receive the Eucharist; let us ask God to straighten out our own paths ... to level out our spikes ... to fill up the holes ... to help us to shorten the distance we’ve place between Him and us.

Let us rely on the saving power of Jesus Christ to not only transform us - but to re-orient us, on a more direct route to Him. So that moving through this Season of Advent, we may come ever closer to Jesus Christ.