

As a kid, I had the amazing ability to take things apart. I could open things up, remove all the parts, and spread them out and examine them. Sadly, for myself and my family, I wasn't any good at putting things back together.

Eventually, this overflowed into some mechanical ability; and an Engineering Degree. And I still like digging in to just about anything - to try to understand how it's all put together.

In today's readings, we hear first from the prophet Baruch - who is writing during the Babylonian Captivity. Jerusalem had been devastated by the assault several years prior, and as such, there were plenty of reasons for "*mourning and misery*".

Yet God has a plan. And through the prophet, He gives a view of that plan: "*peace ... justice ... glory*" ... in such abundance that "*Israel [will] advance in the glory of God.*"

We hear a similar Scripture from Isaiah quoted in the Gospel when it speaks about the ministry of St. John the Baptist: "*valleys ... filled ... mountains ... made low*". This is the 'flip-side' of God's plan that was spoken of in the Old Testament and we see being played out in the New Testament.

And in St. Paul's letter to the Philippians, Paul speaks of his own "*joy*" and affection for those in Philippi. Which is peculiar, because when Paul wrote this letter, he was in prison.

For ourselves, Advent is primarily a penitential season. Parishes often have penance services, and people are given more opportunities to go to confession. In a sense, we are trying to start the new liturgical year off on the right foot.

But Advent is also a time of expectation. Baruch and Isaiah wrote when the nation of Israel was exiled to Babylon. All the people longed for the day when they could return to their homeland ... and rebuild the city of Jerusalem.

St. Paul, too, during his own captivity, longed for his freedom - yet found the time to exhort others to rejoice ... using his time in prison to emphasize that we are all pilgrims in exile ... until at last we reach our homeland in heaven.

Paul's desire for his listeners is that they grow in every sort of spiritual virtue. He tells them that he prays for them to increase in "*love ... knowledge ... discern[ment] ... and] ... pur[ity]*" and they might be "*filled with the fruit of righteousness / that comes through Jesus Christ / for the glory and praise of God.*"

But no matter how broken things may seem ... no matter if we can't see a way to put things together again ... no matter our particular circumstances: God does have a plan ... and God's plan is played out ... in God's own time.

In Advent, we wait in a special way for the coming of Jesus - (1) as we commemorate His first coming at Christmas ... (2) in His Sacramental coming in the Eucharist ... (2) and when He will return again in glory.

As we approach this altar to receive the Sacred Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of Jesus Christ, let us pray for our own growth in spiritual things. May we recognize that our citizenship is in heaven. And through the graces we receive in this Mass and in the Most Blessed Sacrament of the Eucharist ... may we all grow in (1) love, (2) knowledge, (3) discernment, (4) and purity ... as well as in our relationship with Jesus Christ ... Who is the same yesterday ... today ... and forever.