

SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT (YEAR C)

December 5, 2021

Baruch 5:1–9 • Philippians 1:4–6, 8–11 • Luke 3:1–6

I.

I consider it an accomplishment:

On Monday, I finished reading *Jane Eyre*—
nine months after I started.

It's a very long book,
and, to be honest, reading it felt, at times, like a slog.

The English author, Charlotte Brontë, published this novel in 1847.

It tells the story of a young lady, Jane Eyre,
who lives in rural England during the early 1800s.

Some general thoughts occurred to me about the title character
in light of today's readings.

Jane Eyre experiences many ups and downs in her life—
the “mountains” and “valleys” we hear about in the Gospel.

Characters in the book,
including with Jane herself,
describe her as having a plain outward appearance.

I wonder whether this is the origin of the phrase “plain Jane”?

Despite those outward appearances,
Jane Eyre has a strong moral character:

She possesses integrity, honesty, goodness, loyalty, honor, and dignity.

She is also determined, persevering, sensitive—maybe overly sensitive—
God-fearing, and even pious.

Jane is outwardly submissive,
 according to the social mores of her time,
 but she makes her own decisions, including difficult ones.

Trying circumstances affect her,
 but they never control her.

My impression is that Jane Eyre is a woman of great inner strength,
 a strength that enables her to deal with the vicissitudes of life.

What is the source of Jane Eyre's mettle?

She has faith in God, and she prays.

She has high ideals, and she holds herself to them.

She has will power, perhaps bordering on stubbornness.

And she's humble:

She knows her limitations—
 either personal or those imposed by society—
 and she seems to know her strengths.

II.

*“Every valley shall be filled
 and every mountain and hill shall be made low.”*

We don't have to look to the horizon to find valleys and mountains.

They can be the ones we traverse during the course of our lives.

The words of St. John the Baptist,
 which are always heard on the Second Sunday of Advent,
 have to do with attaining the right “height” or “depth”—
 the level at which we can encounter God:

*“The winding roads shall be made straight,
 and the rough ways made smooth,
 and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.”*

The message of John the Baptist is repentance—
taking the actions necessary to meet God:

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

God himself initiates the encounter;
he stirs his people to repentance.

He does that by promising something better,
something far more grand than we can imagine:

“Jerusalem, take off your robe of mourning and misery;
put on the splendor of glory from God forever...
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 message of this Second Sunday of Advent is to aim higher in life,
and to go deeper in our relationship with God.

That “depth” is the source of inner strength and moral character.

It comes from God,
from our encounter with him.

“Depth” or inner strength is not just a matter of will power—
that would be mere self-improvement,
which leaves no room for God.

“Depth” is the leveling of the “mountains” and “hills” of life,
the filling in of the “valleys.”

“Depth” is communion with God:
an encounter with him,
the development of trust,
and, ultimately, the reciprocal sharing of life.

“Depth” is the flowing of God’s own power and life into our own:

*“The winding roads shall be made straight,
and the rough ways made smooth,
and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.”*

There are things we can do to meet God.

One of them is to receive the Sacrament of Penance,
also known as Confession or Reconciliation.

Of all the sacraments,
this is the one that levels mountains and fills in valleys.

We come before God, repenting of our sins,
and the Lord mercifully heals and restores us.

So, an encouragement:
Receive the Sacrament of Penance before Christmas.

Confessions are heard each Wednesday at 5:30 p.m.

On Wednesday, December 22, at that same time,
several priests will be on hand to hear confessions.

IV.

What we do—*“Prepare the way of the Lord”*—is also what God is doing.

After all, he’s coming to meet us.

As St. Paul says in the second reading,

“I am confident of this,
that the one who began a good work in you
will continue to complete it until the day of Christ Jesus.”

Sin can stop us, but it cannot stymie God.

His promises echo through the mountains and valleys of life.

He’s waiting to meet us—to give us his own life.