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9 December 2018

In the first reading, we hear a powerful image: because of the light of God, *every lofty mountain will be made low, and the age-old depths and gorges will be filled to level ground.* We hear a similar image in the Gospel reading: because of the Light of Christ, *Every valley shall be filled and every mountain and hill shall be made low. The winding roads shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth.*

One way to reflect on these readings together is to ask ourselves this question: *How Can the Light of Christ in our lives fill our valleys of sadness, level our mountains of anxiety, and smooth out the rough edges of our personalities and our souls?* The answer is: Christ doesn't generally do any of this. He generally doesn't prevent sadness and anxiety, and He generally doesn't smooth out completely all our rough edges. What the light of Christ does, however, it to help us **cope** with the valleys and the mountains and our flaws. And that confidence that we can cope, often makes those valleys and mountains **seem** less extreme.

Here's a helpful image about light. The Hebrew word for light is *or*, which shares a root of the English word *order*. This is because the ancient Israelites, believed that with the creation of the world, light brought *order* to the *chaos of darkness*. Light didn't dispel the darkness – it helped them manage it. With that perspective, the light of Christ helps us to **manage, not prevent** the darkness in our lives. This perspective is consistent with our parish advent theme: we aren't guaranteed lightning bolts of revelation or cure, but with open minds and searching

hearts, each of us can see **glimmers of grace that will help us cope** – in all areas of our daily lives, including parenting, health, and spirituality.

**For parenting**, I was a helicopter parent. I spent an enormous amount of time and energy to protect my kids from all sadness, disappointment, self-doubt and failure. What I learned after many years, is that the best way we can help our kids become happy, self-confident, and loving adults is to give them opportunities when they are children to **experience and learn how to manage** sadness, frustration, failure, and rejection – because no matter what we or they do, life will bring them all of that. Effective parenting is not about preventing darkness in our kids' lives – it's about teaching our kids how to manage darkness. So, when our kids hit those valleys and mountains, we might want to try to resist the urge to jump in and fix it ...like yelling at the ref or complaining to a teacher or giving the child a pep-talk that they are good at everything. Instead, we might want to try just taking a breath, saying a quick silent prayer for strength, and then...then just hug our children, let them cry. Let them do their inner work -- while they are in our arms. The image of light is applicable here, too. When they are young and scared of the night, we generally don't leave the overhead light on all night in their bedrooms in order to dispel the darkness. Instead, we turn on a small nightlight to help the child **manage** the darkness. A glimmer of grace. Like what Christ does for us.

**For Health**, it's the same dynamic -- the light of Christ does not always **cure** illness, but it will always, always, help us to **cope** with it. In the fields of mental health and addiction, this is what we call "recovery" -- a conceptual framework in which we acknowledge that addiction and some forms of more severe mental illness are biological in nature, currently without a cure, a life-long journey, and that the newer treatment approach has shifted away from trying to **prevent** symptoms of mental illness or prevent the desire to use substances. Instead, we teach people

how to **manage** those symptoms of mental illness and to manage the desire to use. In fact, with folks who are still in denial that they have an addiction and who have not yet decided that they even want to stop using substances, the current treatment approach is not to prevent use, but rather teach those folks how to **manage** use--- so when they use substances, they do so in a way that reduces harm to themselves or others. Many people learn how to manage these conditions, with the help of God or a higher power.

**For spirituality**, it's the same perspective. When we commit sinful acts, it's not because of we desire to hurt others; it's because we are driven to by emotional vulnerabilities -- fear, anxiety, compulsiveness, low self-esteem and other personality weaknesses. And these **rough edges** of our personalities are probably not going to ever **smooth out completely**, no matter how hard we pray and how hard we work at it. It's part of the human condition. But, the light of Christ can help us *manage* those vulnerabilities so that hopefully we are able to reduce the frequency of sinful acts or at least reduce the harm those acts have on others and ourselves.

So, as the earth slowly rotates toward night again in several hours, **here's the good news**. We don't need to fear the dark – around our kids, in our bodies, in our minds, or in our souls. We can have the confidence that with the light of Christ, we can manage the darkness. The child who blew the championship or failed the test, or the teenager in a break-up or rejected by lots of colleges -- we can all of that handle that because God will help us manage it. Those personality weaknesses that continue to dog us every day in different forms– we can handle that because God will help us manage it. Even the addiction that hunts us or the cancer that haunts us – we can handle that because God will help us manage it. As night descends upon us and blackness envelopes us, the opportunity to distract ourselves with image and sound abandons us, and those old fears begins to rise, we **will** feel a sense of peace and hope when, through the disorienting

darkness, we see a nightlight in the bedroom or a couple stars in the sky. And we will know deep down in our heart of hearts that these subtle lights are **glimmers of grace**, reminders that God with help us manage all the valleys and all the mountains and all our flaws. And, together as a family and a parish community, in the light of Christ, we can handle whatever comes our way.

## DECEMBER 9, 2018

### Second Sunday of Advent

#### READING 1 **BAR 5:1-9**

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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.

## READING 2 [PHIL 1:4-6, 8-11](#)

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Brothers and sisters:

I pray always with joy in my every prayer for all of you,  
because of your partnership for the gospel  
from the first day until now.

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.

God is my witness,  
how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus.

And this is my prayer:

that your love may increase ever more and more  
in knowledge and every kind of perception,  
to discern what is of value,  
so that you may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ,  
filled with the fruit of righteousness  
that comes through Jesus Christ  
for the glory and praise of God.

## GOSPEL [LK 3:1-6](#)

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In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar,  
when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea,  
and Herod was tetrarch of Galilee,  
and his brother Philip tetrarch of the region  
of Ituraea and Trachonitis,  
and Lysanias was tetrarch of Abilene,  
during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas,  
the word of God came to John the son of Zechariah in the desert.  
John went throughout the whole region of the Jordan,  
proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins,  
as it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah:

*A voice of one crying out in the desert:*

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

*Every valley shall be filled  
and every mountain and hill shall be made low.  
The winding roads shall be made straight,  
and the rough ways made smooth,  
and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.”*