

Second Sunday of Advent: Road Work

Have you ever driven on a road with ruts? I don't mean a bumpy road, or a road with a hole or two. I mean a road with long deep ruts made, perhaps, by cars, trucks or even tractors too heavy for the road. Ruts are like crevices caused by an earthquake. You cannot drive over them, you have to drive next to them, doing your best to keep the wheels of your car on the road. A number of years ago I was driving through the Lake District of England, that would be Northwest of London. I was with my Mom, Dad and Godmother, all in their 80's at the time. We had wanted to see an ancient Celtic Cross that my guidebook said was located off a farm road. It was over 1500 years old. I didn't realize it, but that meant we ended up driving down a gravel farm road used mostly by heavy tractors. As we were getting closer to the Cross, the road became worse and worse, with long, deep, horrible ruts. Being on the farm road was not one of my better decisions. I had to drive very, very slowly. I was scared that if my car fell into the rut, it could break an axle or, at the very least, get a flat tire. And here I had three 80 year olds with me, and we would have been stuck in the middle of nowhere, England. I remember that it took me a half an hour to go the short distance that approached the cross. The road just past the cross was paved. You better believe that I took that road and figured out a way to get back to the hotel. By the way, the cross was impressive, but not worth the risk I took driving to it.

Today's readings tell us that God is coming, but he sees that the road to our hearts is loaded with horrible ruts. John the Baptist calls upon us in the spirit of Isaiah the prophet: "Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight His paths." Advent is the season of personal road work. We need to recognize where we have allowed ruts to occur in our lives. Now I don't mean a few holes here and there, but long deep fissures in our souls caused by our allowing heavy equipment to destroy us.

What heavy equipment? That heavy equipment could be our desire to go along with the crowd around us. It is not just that we join them in doing bad things, it is that we have made these actions part of our lifestyle. We are more concerned with being accepted by others than we are with doing what we know is right and avoiding what we know is wrong. For example, for many people this is the season of parties, and some of these parties are not healthy, even out-and-out immoral. But we see it as part of our lifestyle to go to these parties even though we know that when we are there we will not behave as a son or daughter of God. "This is what we do, I do," we say. We have allowed our desire to be accepted by some others to determine our lifestyle. That is a rut in God's road to our heart.

Sometimes the heavy equipment that causes our own personal ruts is our pride. Perhaps we have been involved in a disagreement with another person, or even an out

and out argument. We feel our upset at that person boiling up every time that person's name is mention, let alone when we see him or her. We are angry. What is worse, we want to be angry. We do not have the humility to forgive him or her. "Who does he think he is?" we say to ourselves over and over. We might say to others that we forgive that other person, but we really don't. We are too proud to forgive him or her. Our pride has caused a rut in God's road to our heart.

Sometimes the heavy equipment that causes our personal ruts is our selfishness. We may have formed an attitude in life that puts ourselves as the center of existence. We use others for our own gain. We tend to form friendship with those from whom we can profit. Like the politician who glad hands everyone before the election and few people after the election, we tend to treat people according to what they can do for us, whatever we can get out of them. This may even take place within our immediate families. Sadly, many a husband or wife have left a marriage because they no longer felt they were getting anything out of it. The "what's in it for me" attitude in life causes serious ruts in God's road to our hearts.

I mentioned before that we may have a few holes here and there that we need to fill in. And most of the time when we go to confession, we do just that. We look at those things we may have done or failed to do and seek forgiveness from God. This is good, but is it good enough? We need to be more thorough. We need to ask ourselves why do we do the things that formed those holes. We need to ask if we have attitudes in life that are the reasons why we commit this or that sin. Did we do these things because we lack the determination to be our best selves and would rather join the in-crowd? Did we do these things out of pride? Are many of our actions motivated by our selfishness?

During Advent we need to prepare the way of the Lord. During Advent we need to do the serious road work, the work of recognizing what ruts have ingrained themselves in our lives. It is interesting that we will often use the expression, "I'm in a rut," referring to our doing the same thing over and over again. It is sad that we often refuse to recognize the attitudes in our lives that lead us to do the same things over and over again.

During Advent we need to "Prepare the way of the Lord, and make straight his paths." During Advent we need to make a good confession, a truly good confession, and ask God to help us recognize if there are ruts in our lives and to fill them in with his way, the way of love. God is not done with any of us yet. Paul tells his beloved Philippians, and us, 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.*

We pray today to the Lord of Road Work.