

Dear Parishioners,

Saved by the bell! ... The firefighter saved the baby from sure death ... The relief pitcher saved the game ... We hear the word “save” frequently in our everyday chatter and know what it means: to be rescued from a bad situation, from danger, from an unwanted outcome. This weekend’s Gospel doesn’t use the word “save,” but instead “salvation.” What does it mean to “see the salvation of God” that Isaiah the Prophet foretold? Here the meaning of “save” is not quite so straightforward. Much more is promised than being rescued. In fact, what the Gospel is about is not so much being saved from as being saved by and for.

John quite clearly tells us how we are saved: seek “*repentance for the forgiveness of sins.*” We are to actively level out the mountains and valleys of our own lives. We are to “make straight” our relationship with God and with others. We sometimes don’t understand nor are we aware of the critical importance of repentance and forgiveness in our relationships with each other, and how critical they are for our salvation. Baruch’s prophesy of a glorious future was fulfilled when Israel returned from exile (First Reading and Responsorial Psalm). Isaiah’s prophesy of future glory quoted in the Gospel (“*all flesh shall see the salvation of God*”) is fulfilled when we return to God through repentance and forgiveness. “*Repentance for the forgiveness of sins*” is an essential requirement for us to “*see the salvation of God.*” We are saved by the actions of God for putting on “*the splendor of glory from God forever*” (First Reading).

The salvation of God is progressively revealed in repentance (our work) and forgiveness (God’s work). The meandering paths and winding roads of our lives are straightened, and the valleys filled, and mountains brought low when our lives are characterized by attitudes of repentance. To repent means to change one’s mind ... to change one’s life. This is how we reach the fulness that is promised. This is how we reach our true home. “*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength ... and you shall love your neighbor as yourself.*” By increasing our love for one another, by discerning “*what is of true value,*” and by being “*filled with the fruit of righteousness*” (Second Reading). Our work of repentance is a matter of turning ourselves toward the God who embraces us in mercy and forgiveness and welcomes us home. Our work of repentance is our response to the word-invitation to “*see the salvation of God.*” We are to hear the “Word of God” and to act on it. Do we? How well?

Let’s be honest. It’s not just the busyness of Christmas preparations now in full December fury that distracts us from our ongoing work of repentance and forgiveness. Every day of the year we tend to be distracted by mountains of work, paths of indecision, and valleys of doubt and fear. Like John the Baptist, we are to hear “the Word of God” that comes to us ... that challenges us to embrace a more God-like way of living ... that not only promises salvation but shows us the path to it.

Changing our lives to live more faithfully Gospel values is not easy. Nor do we ever get to a point in our daily living when we have arrived at the mountain top and no longer need to act on God’s Word, change our minds about what is most important to us, open ourselves to God’s forgiveness of our wrongdoing, and learn how we in turn are to forgive others. This is the path to salvation. It is not an easy one. But it is a rewarding one.

May Saint Michael the Archangel defend, guide, protect, and intercede for us always!

Fr. Larry