

## Getting from here to there

If the topic of “men and driving directions” comes up in mixed company, it’s a pretty likely that the women in the group will chuckle in unison, bemoaning the fact that men aren’t exactly famous for asking for directions.

“I know exactly where I’m going...” “Yes, I remember where the place is...right near that gas station...somewhere...”

Whether we are a directionally-challenged man or an internally-compassed woman, one of the big questions facing us humans has always been: How do we get from here to there? During this Advent season we’re not talking about getting from San Francisco to Cebu, or Daly City to Mexico City—we’re talking about the BIG movements in life: From ignorance to wisdom. From fear to courage. From separateness to unity. From war to peace. From possession to surrender. From resentment to reconciliation. From pettiness to bigness. From childishness to maturity.

This season, and the ever-so-brilliantly arranged Advent feasts of Mary which we celebrate this week are such a great help in this question of how do we as human beings move from the ignorance the fears, the clinging, the hatreds the resentments that, though so temporarily comfortable, ultimately lead to personal and communal death.

Our readings and our liturgical music this week speak to this quest we have for the roadmap, the guide book for getting to the place that in our hearts we know we ought to be.

We hear the prophet Isaiah beckoning us to be comforted, not by a God of ease, but by a God who challenges us to make the valleys rich with life, and the mountains, the obstacles to God’s loving care, cleared of the boulders that block us from God and each other.

We sing in our Psalm of God’s desire for peace, and our need to make that peace possible by establishing the justice that is the necessary foundation for it.

In our Gospel we find the opening lines of Mark’s account—not the birth of Jesus, but the preparatory ministry of his locust-eating cousin, John. John promises that it is through, and only through, the honest acknowledgement of our humanness, our pettiness, our fearfulness (the true meaning of repentance) that we will be ready for the baptism of the Spirit which will come with the presence of Jesus amongst us.

By no accident, but rather through the wisdom and vision of the men and women of the Vatican Council and earlier councils who shaped the liturgical calendar not only to reflect the organic flow of the seasons of nature but the intersecting themes of scripture and tradition, we celebrate in this week of Advent two important Marian feasts, the Immaculate Conception (December 8), and Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe (December 12).

Far beyond the obvious connection of Mary to Advent via a vis her physical role of bearer of the Christ, the Promised of Ages, we celebrate her in Advent as a reminder that she, blessed among women, actually was willing to walk that road from fear to courage, from self-protection to generosity, from possession to surrender, from pettiness to bigness, from childishness to maturity.

Her “Yes” to the invitation of God, despite her youth, despite her knowledge that she, a pregnant, unmarried girl would be the object of judgment and humiliation, and despite her knowledge that her son, the Messiah, would be rejected and murdered by his own people—this “YES” was the quintessential statement of her commitment to let go of fear, let go of limiting assumptions, let go of stereotypes, let go of social expectations, of “practicality,” and trust in the loving providence of God.



We sing of “Immaculate Mary,” yes, the pure vessel honored to hold the gift of God’s love. But it does Mary a great disservice to see her purity as a distancing from her humanity. In her willingness to be the bearer of the Christ, and, soon enough, his teacher, and, in the end, the 40-something mother who watches her son being murdered and finally placed, broken and lifeless in her arms, there is nothing neat clean and “pure” about her. She is as immersed in the dirt, messiness and chaos of this human experience as any of us—and all the more so as the first disciple of this Jesus who chose to be the exemplar of truest humanness by himself embracing the unclean, the disposed of, the messy.

And the glorious feast of Guadalupe, the celebration of Mary as the divine figure who, as did her Son Jesus, recognizes in the humble gentility of Juan Diego of the New World a nobility and worthiness to which the Old World was blind. Mary appears not to a saint, nor a prelate, nor the ruling Spanish Conquistadores, but, instead, to the simple peasant Indio Juan, starkly reminding this New World that the old ideas of God as conqueror, as rewarder of the “successful,” are to be cast aside in favor of the view of God as protector of the oppressed and champion of justice. As Christ did for the ancient world of the first century, so Mary, through this intervention in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, gives the New World (in terms far more than geographical) the challenge to revamp its priorities, its assumptions of righteousness, and return to the elemental Christian principles of universal dignity and worth.

And so, in our music today and this week, we hear more roadmap pointers, hearkenings to light and hope. We sing again in our opening chant of “O Come, O Come Emmanuel,” in our Penitential Rite “Let us see your mercy,” in our Psalm, in our voicing of “Sing We of Mary,” “There Is a Longing,” in “In the Day of the Lord,” The King Shall Come,” the timeless cry for direction and guidance.

Are we ready to ask for directions to the life most fully lived? Are we willing to learn how to get from here to there? The God who made us thinks so. And that’s why he gave us Jesus and Mary to show the way.