

3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday in Advent (B)

12/14/2014

One fine day Michael O'Malley is driving on a very busy street in Dublin *'in a sweat'* because he has an important meeting and cannot find a parking place. He looks up to heaven and says, *'O God, take pity on me. If you find me a parking place I promise to go to Mass every Sunday for the rest of my life and give up my whiskey during Advent and Lent.'*

Just at that moment a parking place appears. Michael, pulling into the spot, declares, *'Cancel that request God, I found one on my own.'*

I sometimes wonder if the gospel writer, John, doesn't intend a doubt meaning when he has John the Baptist - in our gospel story today - say, *"I am the voice of one crying out in the desert, 'make straight the way of the Lord.'"*

One meaning could (possibly) be the writer's intention to connect the **Baptist** with **Isaiah** who is declaring freedom from captivity for **Israel**. Another meaning could (possibly) be the experience of the writer when it comes to proclaiming that **God dwells with us now**. *A voice of one who cries out in the desert is heard by very few people!*

Hearing and practicing that **God dwells with us now** seems to be the most difficult thing for us to do... we are (seemingly) always getting in our own way; always making deals (**Mike O'Malley**) and quickly taking credit for anything that we perceive as positive happens. When something perceived by us as negative happens, however, then it is **God's** or someone else's undertaking.

**Isaiah** points to a way by which we can more readily know **God dwelling with us**. The prophet encourages us to **identify** with the poor. That is, we are to **practice God dwelling with us** by **practicing** to see **God dwelling with others...** especially those without power, prestige, or money. When we **practice**, it begins to dawn on us that it is **God's Spirit** that is empowering us.

Ironically, the awareness that we are empowered by the **Spirit of God** is both **exciting** and **depressing**, both **joy-filled** and **frightening**. **Depressing** and **frightening** because we can't take credit and feel out of control. This is especially true if our **operating or belief system** tells us that we have to earn **God's** love or feel guilty. **Excited** and **joy-filled** because we know (somehow) that someone infinitely bigger than ourselves is connected with us.

This is the great mystery of **God's freedom**: somehow, somehow **God** connects with us for no other reason than it is who **God** is. It is a mystery that is most difficult for us to **hear** and **practice** - like '*the voice of one crying out in the desert.*'