

HOMILY

SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT

How many of you are very familiar with downtown Detroit? It can be very difficult to find your way. Detroit is laid out like a wheel. The major streets, like Woodward and Jefferson, are like the spokes in the wheel, and the side streets kind of circle around. Nothing is laid out like a grid; and in general, the street names can be poorly labeled and there are a lot of one way streets. I got really familiar with downtown Detroit because I worked there for years when I worked for the state. My service area was downtown Detroit, and I made a lot of home visits, so I became very familiar, but that was almost 30 years ago. Recently, I was meeting friends for dinner at a restaurant in kind of an out of the way place in Detroit, and I thought I could find it without any problem; but I was wrong. I quickly realized that I was totally lost so I pulled up Waze, my GPS. My friend, who was a passenger, said a few times things like: "It is telling us to turn left, but I think we should turn right." Finally I said: "We are both lost. Why are we second guessing the GPS? I am just going to follow the directions. We got there without a problem. Waze directed us to a place to park and avoided all the construction. The GPS had information that I did not have. The GPS had the big picture.

When I read the Gospel Reading today: *"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,"* I thought about downtown Detroit. There was no way that I could change the layout of the Detroit streets, but with the help of the GPS, I could navigate it. You know, we have someone who can help navigate our way through life. That is **Jesus ... the way, the truth and the life.**

In the same way that my GPS has big picture information that I just do not have, Jesus has big picture information about our lives that we do not have. Like my friend, who did not want to follow the GPS, sometimes we do not want to follow Jesus. I think there are a couple of reasons for that. First of all, I think we do not always trust Jesus and the way he is leading us. I have experienced this myself. There have been times when I kind of get the intuition that I should do something, but it does not make logical sense and it is just not something I would have come up with. I have learned to take a deep breath and do it anyway. It usually ends up being a good decision.

The second reason why we sometimes do not want to follow Jesus is because we really do not expect to get any direction from him, so we do not take the quiet times of prayer to see how he is speaking to us. By the time we check in with Jesus, we are

at our wits' end and do not know what else to do. Have you ever done that? If we would have checked in with the Lord a long time ago, we would have avoided the mess. Example: You did something to hurt my feelings, so I send you an angry text. When I do not get a response to my text, I decide I am going to give you the silent treatment. When you still do not respond, I think, you do not care that I am angry and you do not care that I am not speaking to you. Now I do something to stir the pot. Then I get an invitation to a social event and, of course, I am still giving the silent treatment; so I am not going to go, and I am not going to respond. Now it has become a big deal. If I would have just checked in with Jesus before I sent the angry text, I probably would have cooled off and had a conversation in a day or two that would have resolved it. See how this can take on a life of its own? If you would have prayed about it for just a few minutes, you probably could have solved this with a conversation.

In the Gospel Reading, John the Baptist calls us to repentance. Advent is a time to repent. What is sinful or just not working in your life? How does Jesus want you to resolve it? Repentance includes a change in the direction of our lives. I think our relationships with others have deteriorated during COVID. I think we have forgotten how to relate to one another. In many ways, we have allowed technology to take over our lives. I am talking to more and more people who are content with Zoom, texting, email and social media. Let me tell you, you cannot have a relationship through technology. Jesus is all about loving and serving one another, and St. Paul reinforces this in the Second Reading today. You cannot love someone through technology. You can convey information, but you cannot have a relationship. People are becoming more and more withdrawn and self-centered. We have stopped empathizing with one another because we do not really know what people are going through because we are not relating to one another. We think we know what people are thinking and experiencing through technology, but we do not. I have heard people say, "I saw one thing that they posted on Facebook; and now I know what group they belong to, and I know all of their beliefs." Really? I think we need to spend time this Advent figuring out how we are going to revive our deteriorating relationships. I think we need to take a look at our "To Do" list for Advent and see if our priorities are in line with Jesus. Does your "To Do" list lead to anxiety or to love? The only thing that is really important in our lives is our relationships. Does your "To Do" list focus upon the people in your life? Are you lost in the winding road of Advent? Ask Jesus for direction.

Jesus ... the way, the truth and the life.

Love & Peace,
Fr. Jim