

EVERY VALLEY SHALL BE FILLED

(There are so many ups and downs to life. Go, in his kingdom, will smooth out the rough road on which we travel.

On Tuesdays I teach the eighth grade in our parish school. I teach them about Jesus, about how to pray, about how to recognize the movement of God and the Holy Spirit in their lives. Last week I asked them to pray in the form of writing a letter to Our Lord. It is a technique I use when I journal. I asked them to write a letter to Our Lord with three requests in it. First, a specific blessing for their moms and dads, something that they thought would truly be a blessing upon them. Second, I asked them to ask for a blessing from God for our world, that which we are most in need of at this time. Third, I asked them to ask for a blessing for themselves at this time in their lives as they are coming to the end of their elementary education and preparing to enter the world of adolescence and high school.

For the world almost everyone asked for an end to violence and the gift of peace to our world. For themselves most asked for help to do better in school, become their best selves and get into a good high school. With regard to their parents let me read (anonymously) several of the requests.

Dear Lord,

I ask for my parents that you relieve the stress of the holidays, activities and work so that they can celebrate Christmas for what it really is.

I want them to have more time for themselves and not always have to be helping me and my siblings.

Thank you for watching over my parents. I am glad that you made sure they were kind and that you made sure they always made the right choices in their life.

I wish for my parents to be happy and for grandmom to get better for my mom.

I would like for you to give my parents a healthy holiday.

For my parents, I would like them to have patience in dealing with me.

Could you give my parents a great holiday with the family and let them know that I know they work hard and I thank them.

I would like a blessing for my parents, for them to feel more loved and feel like they have done a good job in taking care of my brother and me.

For my parents I would like them to come to peace with each other all around them.

A blessing I wish my parents is that they will be able to keep their jobs and that life can be made easier.

We often hear it said, and sometimes say it ourselves, “Young people don’t get it.” Well, these young people give evidence that they do get it, they appear to notice a great deal of what their parents are facing and dealing with in their homes. These young

people have a sense of what their parents truly need and what would make their lives better. It is a bit ironic to listen to fourteen-year olds offer reasons of hope and blessing to their moms and dads. These very same kids might be part of their parents' stress but they seemed determined to try to alleviate it, to set them free of it.

“Every mountain shall be made low, age-old gorges shall be filled to level ground,” is the way the prophet Baruch expresses it in today's first reading. “Every valley shall be filled in; every mountain and hill made low; winding ways straight and rough ways smooth,” is the way Isaiah the prophet said it. “The ups and downs of life shall be ironed out. “Depression and joy shall be balanced,” is what these eighth graders wish for their parents.

Those olden days when the prophets prophesied were not so easy either. In the four Sundays of Advent we will hear from Jeremiah, Baruch, Zechariah and Micah. They were prophets from the 8th century BC until the 6th century BC. Assyria conquered Israel and carried away the Jewish people. They returned, rebuilt and then experienced something similar under Babylon in the 6th century BC. Now at the time of the Baptist and Jesus it is Rome who has them under its thumb. Eventually Rome will destroy Israel and scatter the people of Israel across the ancient world. These too were periods of instability, chaos, financial hardship and uncertainty. The prophetic message was not a message of prosperity. The message was one of repentance whereby the people recognized that they had a hand in what had befallen them. They were to own their sinfulness and ask for forgiveness of their God. They were to repent, apologize and come forward to be washed clean.

The call is to renew their relationship with God, restore what had been damaged or destroyed. We can start over with God. God offers us pardon, a free pass, a second chance. And God offers this to us right where we are and right in the midst of our daily living. Years ago, through the workings of our parents Christ offered us the cleansing waters of baptism. We were each washed clean and refreshed. We are able to access these waters again in the sacrament of reconciliation.

These eighth graders had a vision of hope for their parents, a desire for their moms and dads. They did not mention what their parents' dreams for them might be although I sense they probably know what those dreams are. But each of these young people wishes the other to be set free from all that ensnares them and burdens them. Jesus wishes to do the same for us. How often do we tell the Lord we are sorry? Why not every day? How often do we tell the Lord that we love him? Why not today? Right now? During the consecration of this Mass as I hold high the host, tell the Lord of your love. Tell the Lord what is in your heart right now, even your anxieties and fears. Make the resolve to go to confession in the next two weeks. I find that getting to this sacrament with regularity is very helpful to me in overcoming resentment, removing the edge or tone from my voice, diminishing my angry responses to events and people. I am not exactly sure how it works but I can attest that it works.

And don't forget to get quiet and do some very simple listening. Perhaps you can hear what is in the hearts of your children and loved ones. Remember what Paul says in the second reading today: “Your children are remembered by God”—as are you!