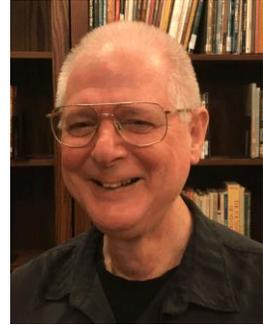


“For some time now . . .”

by Tom Redmond, S.M.

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For some time now I have been aware that a central message of Advent is to “make the rough ways smooth.” In this Liturgical Cycle of Year B we hear the Prophet Isaiah proclaim this message in the first reading on the Second Sunday of Advent and similar words are from John the Baptist in the Gospel on the Third Sunday of Advent. Isaiah and John were quite aware that the Messiah was approaching and to make the rough ways smooth – both literally and figuratively – was an essential piece to this preparation.

For some time now I have had a growing awareness that this message is not just for Advent, this is a way of life; each day offers opportunities to make rough ways smooth.

For some time now I have been grappling with how to do this. As I looked around my area of the world, I became aware of many rough areas:

- rough areas in my religious community. What can I say, what can I do to smooth, to sooth some of this roughness?
- rough areas in the high schools in which I taught, tension among faculty, tensions between students, tensions students experience at home . . . What can I do, what can I say to smooth, to sooth some of this roughness?
- rough areas in the lives of some family and friends. What can I do, what can I say to smooth, to sooth some of this roughness?
- and of course, some rough areas in my own life! What can I do to smooth, to sooth some of these rough edges?

Advent season by Advent season I have found myself growing in awareness of specific ways to make rough ways smooth.

For some time now I been looking at the variety of issues addressed by the Marianist Social Justice Collaborative. I felt drawn to a couple of the Issue Teams, but aware of the limits of my time and energy I sensed some hesitancy to take the next step to connect with a specific Team. As this message “make rough ways smooth” continued to stir within me the Issue Team of *Restorative Justice and Ending the Death Penalty* came into focus – healing the lives of victims and their families and healing the lives of those imprisoned.

A traditional view of crime and punishment is seen as a violation of law and asks these three questions:

1. What law was broken?
2. Who is to blame?
3. What is to be the punishment for breaking this law?

The Catholic Mobilizing Network offers a series of educational modules on restorative justice and a call to end the death penalty. Restorative justice understands crime and harm in all of its forms as a violation of people and relationships; it changes the focus from a law that was broken to relationships that were harmed through these three questions:

1. What was the harm that occurred?
2. How were people impacted and what are their needs?
3. What must be done to repair the harm?

Restorative justice supports solidarity, transformation, and reconciliation. This is hard work, but it is necessary work to make rough ways smooth, to sooth the hurts in both the offended and in the offender.

In regard to the death penalty, citing a statement from the Second Module offered by the Catholic Mobilizing Network we read, “The death penalty is perhaps the least restorative aspect of our criminal justice system. It promotes revenge instead of mercy, it does not heal the harm on its victims and does not deter crime.”

May we each hear and take the message of Advent to heart, “To make the rough ways smooth,” growing in awareness of what we might say, of what we might do to smooth, to sooth the roughness on our own area of the world.