“Recalculating!”

If you use a GPA device in your car to help you find your way, you will know all about “recalculating!” My GPS features a very nice sounding woman’s voice, telling me to turn right or left in so many miles or hundred feet. But if I somehow don’t execute the proper turn, after a couple of seconds, the lady intones, “recalculating”. It always sounds to me as if the word is pronounced with mild irritation, as if the nice lady is saying to me, ‘Hey, get it together; you messed up and I will now have to get you out this.’ And it gets worse if I continue to make the wrong turns- well, it sure seems that way. More and more declarations, “Recalculating”!! “Recalculating!!”

These weeks before Christmas, a season the Church calls Advent, challenge us in so many ways. These are wonderful days, filled with preparations for Christmas. At every turn there are concerts, open houses, and ‘holiday events’. We have our shopping lists, Christmas card lists, and menu lists. Decorating, trimming the tree, baking cookies, wrapping presents…. And before long the great American ‘mass migration’ will take place as a significant segment of the population travels to be with loved ones. Frankly, after a while, it often feels like too much.

Yet in church, we aren’t yet reading about the birth of Jesus; but rather, the stories about John the Baptist. John doesn’t look or sound much like Christmas. He lived an austere life as a desert hermit. His preaching style was confrontational, not really comforting. But John, the herald of Christ, is central to these weeks of anticipation and preparation.

And John would have loved the GPS command, “Recalculate”! His central message in the Gospel story is all about “repenting”. He might as well have said, “Recalculate”. John would tell us, ‘You have taken a wrong turn. Recalculate the way so that you can get back on course.’

It is a good message; one we need to take to heart. Even when we have a map, even when we have others helping us to find our way, we take wrong turns. We get into bad habits. And when we figure it out and can admit that we are lost, our hearts are open to receive the grace of God.

In the spirit of Advent and the admonition to “recalculate” let me offer a couple of suggestions for living in a season of anxiety; for recalculating.

First take a time out each day. Turn the cell phone and TV off. Facebook and email time out. Slow down. Be quiet. You could take a walk, or sit quietly next to a burning candle. And if you find yourself in prayer, with or without words, name your feelings and offer what might be on your heart up to the thrown of grace.

Second, intentionally focus some time each day on those in need; those struggling with life’s many issues and challenges. I don’t mean volunteering to help at Project SHARE or the CARES shelter, although that is a wonderful thing to do. But rather a spontaneous phone call, note, email or ‘tweet’! We live in such a narcissic culture, forever centered on ourselves. The antidote for mirror gazing is simply listening and responding to others, especially those who struggle.
Third, make sure that your faith and the practice of your faith is part of your life, not an event in your busy life. This is a time for homecoming- to church. A time to be fed by Word and Sacrament. A time to rediscover the sense of wonder we once had as children and when we were young in our faith.

Advent is a short season of waiting; of holy expectation. And the operative word is, “Recalculating”!

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