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Who are you wearing?

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Spiritual Reflections

If you have ever watched a Hollywood awards program, you are probably familiar with the fascination many have for the fashions worn by the stars. As each takes a turn in the spotlight on the red carpet, the question inevitably arises: ?Who are you wearing??



On this Second Sunday of Advent, the prophet Baruch poses this same

question to all who are preparing for the present and coming Christ: Who are you wearing? Our response to this question will reveal the authenticity of our desire to recognize and welcome the many comings of Jesus.

During their long wait for the promised Messiah, the ancient Israelites went through several changes of clothes; their "spiritual wardrobe" reflected their circumstances as well as their inner posture toward God. In the time of the patriarchs, the Hebrew tribes were wore the garb of the nomad. When they were forced to work as brick-making in Egypt, they were "clad" as slaves. After their liberation and during their desert trek to the land of God's promise, the people of Israel wore the dress of the new bride, beloved of her husband. Tempted by false gods and their cults, the Israelites were, at times, unfaithful to their divine covenantal partner. But even when they chose the dress of the harlot, God was willing to forgive them, take them back and clothe them once again in holiness and love. Such was the situation that prompted the invitation of Baruch that is preserved in today's first reading.

Having succumbed to her persecutors, Jerusalem wore, for a long, sad time, the robes of mourning and misery. Scholars are of two minds as to which crisis the prophet referenced here. Those who think that the Baruch who authored this text was Jeremiah's "secretary" believe that he was referencing the Babylonian exile. Those who assign this text to a second-century prophet believe that he was describing the sorrows heaped upon the Judahites by Antiochus Epiphanes IV. In either case, it is clear that the call to leave behind their widow's weeds and be dressed anew in glory and justice was issued through the intervention of God.

In today's Lucan Gospel, John the Baptizer celebrates that intervention by inviting his contemporaries to prepare themselves to welcome the salvation of God in the person and through the ministry of Jesus. John proclaimed a baptism whereby sinners would cast off their sin-stained rags and put on robes of repentance. Jesus preached a baptism that initiated believers into the very life of God. Washed clean by the blood of Jesus, the redeemed are to put on Christ and live in holiness and grace.

Paul, in today's second reading, prays for his beloved Philippians and for us, that we will keep ourselves pure and blameless while preparing to welcome Christ in his many daily comings as well as in his final appearance among us. The 14th-century mystic Julian of Norwich described the coming of Christ in flesh and blood as his having put on our human tunic "aged with the sweat of his body, close-fitting and threadbare" (*The Revelation of Divine Love*, Source Books, 1961). Because of Jesus' actions, said Julian, we have received a merciful exchange, the cloak of Christ that envelopes us with endless love. Not only are we privileged to be clothed with Christ, but "we are his crown," that is, Christ is also wearing us! Dressed with Christ, we are also blessed with a dignity and a grace that we are to preserve and protect, not only for ourselves but for all others who are similarly clothed, blessed and graced.

Gail Ramshaw suggests that these liturgical references to garments call us to reflect on how our being clothed with Christ might affect our attitude toward the current culture's obsession with expensive designer attire (*Treasures Old and New: Images in the Lectionary*, Fortress Press, 2002). When asked, "Who are you wearing?" how will we reply? Will our answer be Calvin Klein? Vera Wang? Tommy Hilfiger? Prada? Ralph Lauren? Or will we say with our words, our works and our wardrobe that we have put on the Lord Jesus Christ? We are, as Ramshaw has noted, "God-covered, Christ-attired, dressed in the communal values that arise from life in the Spirit."

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This Sunday scripture commentary appears in full in NCR's sister publication Celebration, a worship and homiletic



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