

2nd Sunday of Advent
Fr. Robert VerEecke, S.J.

Dum spiro, spero. That's Latin if you didn't know. You may have guessed the language but do you know what those words mean? Do you know what these words in an ancient language are trying to communicate? Dum spiro, spero. These sounds that you hear from my voice do they mean something to you? Do you need me to tell you or do you know what they mean? Even if you don't know Latin, you may get the gist of them if you speak Spanish, French, Italian, or Portuguese. Even if you don't speak a language that comes from Latin, you may be able to figure out an English cognate: no dum is no dumb. And Spiro is not the name of a vice president. Spiro. Spirit. And with your spirit. Aspirate. Aspire, aspirations. To breathe. Dum spiro, spero. While I breathe, I hope.

I know that in all the time it took me to break down this Latin phrase, you could have gone to your Blackberrys or Droids or iPhones and gotten the translations. We can find the meaning of words quickly these days but the real meaning of words, the potential for opening up our minds and hearts, takes time. Language is meant to communicate: the voice crying in the wilderness is meant to be heard. The words are meant to communicate a deeper reality. Prepare ye the way of the Lord. Change your lives.

Words are meant to communicate but sometimes language is a barrier. If you don't understand a language, you are left out. The words, or really sounds that you hear, can cut you off from the reality they are trying to express. They are literally a SOUND BARRIER.

Dum Spiro, Spero. While I breathe, I hope. One of the lead articles in the *Boston Globe* today speaks of pessimism and "hopelessness" with respect to the economic climate. There are prophets of "doom and gloom" who look at all that is going wrong with our economy, the political landscape of the world, and can find no hope. We can certainly find many reasons to be hopeless when we look into the future but if we are hopeless than ultimately we are "life less." While I breathe, I hope.

Have the words you have heard in our advent liturgy today been an inspiration, an invitation to breathe deeply of hopes and aspirations for our church and world, for your own struggles and challenges? Or have the words you have heard been a sound barrier between you and God who desires to

give you comfort and consolation? Do the words you have heard get in the way of this beautiful, intimate relationship with the God who desires you, the God who in Jesus Christ wants to fill your spirit with hope and promise?

To be honest, one of the fears that many of us who preside at liturgy is that the “new translations” of Latin will not communicate in a way that opens you to a deeper relationship with the God who loves you, cares for you, but rather be a sound barrier. Words that not only get in the way but words that give you the wrong impression about God, a return to a medieval image of God who is enthroned above but who deigns to “come down” reluctantly, and will only do so if we beg, entreat, plead and acknowledge how really bad we are.

So I hope that the language of our common prayer will not be a barrier between us and God but rather an invitation to go deeper into the mystery of God’s love for us in Jesus Christ.

So I hope today that the voice of one crying in the wilderness, the prophet Isaiah, gives you comfort, enables you to hope. Can the voice of the prophet Isaiah, speaking words of comfort, bring us that same comfort, counteract the voices that tell us there is no remedy to our “losing hope”?

I hope today that the voice of one in the wilderness crying, “prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths” you hear as a voice of challenge, an exciting voice that invites you to a “change of heart,” a letting go of the past for something totally new.

I hope that those of you who are here for the rite of acceptance, asking for baptism in this Church community, are hearing these voices of comfort, of promise, of challenge, in the voices of the prophet Isaiah and John the Baptist.

I hope that those of you who are here to prepare for your full initiation into the Catholic community through Eucharist and confirmation are hearing these voices as well. There are so many competing voices in our world today. Voices that tell you that God is nowhere to be found or that God is obsolete or that the Church will never change.

Dum spiro, spero. While I live I hope. I hope that your voices will be heard in our world and in our church, calling us to live faithfully.