

## THE STARTING LINE INVITES US TO LOOK FORWARD

There are powerful images given to us by the prophet Baruch. Mountains are made low, gorges are filled in. This road is leading the people of Israel and us to joy by the light of God's glory. When we are looking forward it is hard to trip and stumble. When I was running cross country in high school, we would be invited to invitational meets with 50 to 100 other teams. The start line was immense. So often before meets, we would size up other teams. We would talk to runners we knew to listen to their strategy. No one really told the truth. Some of the best runners would say they were having an off day and at the sound of the gun, they would go out flying. Others would say we are taking this meet as just practice and by the second mile, they were setting records. As we approached the start line, we would look to see what shoes or spikes others were wearing. We were constantly comparing ourselves to others. We spent a lot of time sizing up others.

This Advent the prophets of the readings call us to look past others to the wonders that God is doing. The prophet Isaiah, who is quoted in today's Gospel, tells us every valley will be filled and winding roads will be made straight. If we are not looking ahead, if we are not looking forward, we are missing everything God is doing. The start line is different for each of us. For some, it is a starting point to face addiction. For others, it is marked by the first round of chemo. A start line can be when a child moves from crawling to standing or from standing to walking. This Advent we are to measure our start line by looking at what amazing things God is doing. We will see changes happening that are just as radical as the hills and the valleys the prophets tell of. We will see healing and conversion that changes lives. We just have to keep looking onward. Joy is promised and light will illuminate more than the trees and houses that surround us. Looking forward, transformation is possible and present when we move to the belief that God has a plan.

My best cross country race happened when I stopped sizing others up, looking sideways as to who I could beat and who I could never catch. All comparisons lead to self-destruction and self-doubt. Looking up and forward I found another pace, I found surroundings in which a young runner could just put one foot in front of another and move at a pace that was between him and God.

Look forward; God will lead us to joy,



Father John Ouper