

Second Sunday of Advent (A): How Are You Preparing the WAY?

Isaiah 40:1-5,9-11; Psalm 85:9-10,11-12,13-14; 2 Peter 3:8-14; Mark 1:1-8

As we approach the great feast of Christmas, the liturgy encourages us to intensify our preparation; in particular, this second Sunday of Advent invites us to focus our attention on preparing the way: "Prepare the way of the Lord. Make straight his path" (Mk. 1:3).

But how do we prepare the way?

First, receive the kindness of God. The first reading from the Book of Prophet Isaiah tells us that God guaranteed the exiled Israelites that he would shepherd their journey back. God saw that they suffered a lot because of their sinfulness. God heard their cries, and he already expiated their sins. It was time for them to return to where they belonged. They belonged to him. He is their God, and they are his people. Through the words of Prophet Isaiah, he said, "Comfort, give comfort to my people" (Is. 40:1). Now God commanded Jerusalem to prepare the way for his people: "to make straight the wasteland, and every valley shall be filled in, every mountain and hill shall be made low, the rugged land shall be made a plain" (Is. 40:3-4). They are God's marching orders so that his people may find a secure way, that they could come home, that returning home would not be that difficult; it would be joyful. Who would not listen and respond to this offer of God?

It is also a marching order for us this advent - to remove sinful behavior and straighten our ways. If not all, in one way or another, some of us are victims and suffered from the ways of the worldly — from prejudice and hatred, pride and greed, indifference and injustice, abuse and ill-treatment. You suffered insensitive remarks, cold treatment, or insult. Sometimes you are pushed to the limit, and you fight back to get even, and worst you ended up becoming a victim of your revenge. All these contradict the ways of God. All these are against his kindness. Remember, in St. Paul's letter to the Romans 12: 21, he advises, "Do not be conquered by evil but conquer evil with good." God challenged all of us to help clear them away because they blurred the vision of God's way. They damaged God's tender compassion. The Responsorial psalm inspires us to beg, "Lord, let us see your kindness, and Grant us your salvation" (Ps. 85:8). If you fervently seek God's kindness, he will shepherd you, gather and feed you, bring you close to his heart, and lead you to rest. You only have to open your hearts and receive his kindness but be patient.

Second, be eager to be found without blemish before Jesus. The second letter of Peter, which aims to teach Christians against false teachings, directs our focus on Jesus. His message reminds us that everything before us will dissolve, will disappear, but God will unveil himself to those who wait for him (cf. 2 Pt 3:9-10). Blessed are those who wait for his coming. God is patient and does not wish that anyone should perish, but all should come to repentance.

This is the source of our excitement. However, you do not just wait for things to happen. You are to decide what sort of person you ought to be. And this decision includes choosing to have a joyful disposition. The letter of Peter advises to conduct ourselves with holiness and devotion. Just as you are excited to put colorful lights and decorations in your homes, God invites you to surround yourself, your family, and your home with the conducts of holiness and devotion. Perhaps, you can focus your attention on the gifts given by the Holy Spirit to the Church. Some of these are the twelve fruits of the Holy Spirit. They are virtues of charity, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, forbearance, gentleness, faith, modesty, self-control, and chastity. If you practice and put these virtues into action, at least some of them, they will help you focus on Jesus, and his joy will be given to you.

Third, celebrate the mercy of God. The opening verse of the gospel, "the beginning," is a title for the entire good news that Christ has come to rescue all nations from sin, selfishness, and Satan and reveal God's inner life to the world through Jesus. St. John the Baptist dedicated his life to this "beginning," to this good news, by preparing the people through the baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins (cf. Mk 1:5). It is an invitation to change one's heart, to conversion, and turn one's attention to God's offer of mercy.

Repentance of one's sins is a profound way of celebrating the mercy of God, which is freely given for those in misery and who repent. When you repent, God forgives. When God forgives, God clears the way for him to enter

into your lives again. When you are repentant of your sins, you discover another way that is open to God. A way that God can walk back to your hearts. That way becomes two ways: you walk to God, and God can walk through the way of your life. When this happens, when the path of God is coming to you, and your path is going to God, you have found Jesus, who is the way, and you allow God to form his way into your life.

The best place to celebrate the mercy of God is through the Sacrament of Reconciliation. It is the place where mercy is most profoundly experienced. It is where the human misery of sin is healed. It completes the preparation for Christmas.

St. John Chrysostom eloquently spoke about the beauty of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. He said, "even if you do not confess, God is not ignorant of the deed, since he knew it before it was committed. Why then do you not speak of it? Does the transgression become heavier by the confession? No, it becomes lighter and less troublesome. And this is why he wants you to confess: not that you should be punished, but that you should be forgiven; not that he may learn your sin — how could that be, since he has seen it? — but that you may know what favor he bestows. He wishes you to learn the greatness of his grace, so that you may praise him perfectly, that you may be slower to sin, that you may be quicker to virtue. And if you do not confess the greatness of the need, you will not understand the enormous magnitude of his grace."

"Prepare the way of the Lord. Make straight his path."

A blessed Advent!

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