

Second Sunday of Advent B - "Prepare the way of the Lord, make his path straight"
December 6, 2020.

On this second Sunday of the Advent journey, the Word of God is announced to us as it was written in the book of Isaiah and fulfilled in the ministry of John the Baptist. Long ago God declared: **"I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way; the voice of one crying out in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight'"** (Luke 3:4). It was the central message of John the Baptist, the one whom God had sent to set the stage for the coming of Jesus as the saviour of the world.

John the Baptist, *"clothed in camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist"* went running about in the wilderness of Judea screaming, **"Repent, the Kingdom of God is at hand!"** and **"Prepare the way of the Lord, make his path straight!"** John had something to say to the world. No one and nothing was going to stop him. He didn't care what he looked like. He didn't care what people thought about him, all he cared about was **proclaiming the kingdom of God**. John was not our average cleric, he was not refined or dignified. He did not conduct liturgies in a nice church sanctuary or stand behind a nice pulpit and deliver sophisticated homilies to an attentive parish. No, John took his message to the streets! If John were here today, he would probably be downtown in middle of the public square. He would be right in the centre of the holiday shopping crowd as they count down the "shopping days till Christmas", next to the Salvation Army kettle and the street musicians. There he would be shouting and yelling, **"Repent! and Prepare the way of the Lord!"** People pass by probably will throw him a quarter or a dollar to keep him quiet!

John is telling Israel and us today to get ready, fulfilling two prophecies of the Old Testament. The prophet Malachi said someone would prepare the way for the Lord (Malachi 3:1), **"See I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me, ... The messenger of the covenant in whom you delight—indeed, he is coming, says the Lord."** That someone, as the prophecy in the first reading reminds us, would encourage his listeners to make straight the way of the Lord (Isaiah 40:3): **John the Baptist**. Mark tells us how the way of the Lord was made straight by John (Mark 1:4): **"a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins"**. John's mission was amazing for two reasons: first, because he would actually baptize the Lord when he came, a moment when Our Lord sanctified the waters for Baptism; second, because he would be the last prophet of the Old Testament, the one who would immediately announce the Messiah and see him before his death. **If John tells us how we can make the Lord's path straight — an attitude of repentance and a desire for forgiveness, the Lord's Baptism was a sign of that attitude, and the Baptism we now receive to be "born anew",** as in John 3:3-8: **"Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above"**. Advent is our moment for adopting the right attitude, and Christmas will be the moment when we encounter Our Lord and remember that we too were born in him, leaving the old, dead life of sin behind.

There is a story I once heard about an old man who lived in the centre of a desolate and hopeless city full of hatred, violence, corruption. The man walked outside of his house and onto the streets and yelled **"Love, peace, righteousness!"** The next day he would do the same thing, he would leave his house, walk onto the street and yell at the top of his lungs "Love, peace and righteousness!" He would do this everyday, rain or shine, like clockwork. One day the man's next door neighbour who was tired of the daily yelling, went out on the street and confronted him. He said "Hey man, are you crazy?, what the heck do you think you are doing? Every day you come out of your house and yell 'love, peace and righteousness!' Fool, don't you

know nobody is listening to you! This city is full of hate and crime and hopelessness, there is no love of neighbour and there is no peace and righteousness to be found, so give it a rest and save your breath! Don't you know that you can't change the world?" The old man said, "**You are right, my yelling and shouting may not change the world, but one thing it will do is to stop the world from changing me.**"

Yes, people today probably would not pay much attention to John or his message, but we should. For John realized that the Lord Jesus was coming and he knew that the prophecy of Isaiah would be fulfilled in Jesus. He knew he had to cry: "**The grass withers, the flower fades, when the breath of the Lord blows upon it; surely the people are grass. The grass withers, the flower fades; but the word of our God will stand forever.**" (Isaiah 40:7-8) and that Word of God was coming soon, in the flesh of Jesus. Though many people today would not pay much attention to John or his message, we should pay attention, because John is telling us important things, things we need to know as we wait for the Lord. **He is telling us to be faithful to the Lord and faithful to the reign of God.** He is telling us that life can be a wilderness in which it is hard to hear God's word. John is telling us to be prophetic and speak the word of the Lord. He is telling us not to be overly concerned with exterior things like our appearance, but to concentrate on the condition of our souls. Lastly, **John is telling us to keep tuned in to the reality of God's reign and to tell others about the coming of the Lord, no matter how hopeless we think the cause may be.**

During this week of Advent, remember to prepare the way of the Lord within our life and within our own soul and keep in the corner of our mind the story of the old man and John the Baptist to inspire us. **The Messiah is coming in a few weeks, hidden in a manger in Bethlehem.** But our Lord's Incarnation and birth are also a way in which God comes out of hiding from a humanity lost in sin so that we can seek him again. Our Lord never avoids us, even in those moments where we're letting him down. That alone warrants us seeking to encounter and unite ourselves more deeply with him at Christmas and beyond. In our own way, go and tell others too to "**prepare the way of the Lord.**" As St. John Paul II said, "**Look today to John the Baptist, an enduring model of fidelity to God and his Law. John prepared the way for Christ by the testimony of his word and his life. Imitate him with docile and trusting generosity.**" Keep at this, for it's our evangelical mission. In just a few weeks, the Incarnation of our God will descend over us like a blanket of stars, and we will be filled with the song of angels, the gentle amazement of shepherds, and the humility of the kings. **If the image and the songs of Bethlehem can fill us that day, we might pray during these last few weeks of waiting that our hearts will be filled with the love, peace and righteousness of God and strengthened to bring that Good News to all.**