

Lectionary Faith-Sharing Community

2nd SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Cycle B - December 6, 2020



OPENING PRAYER

Leader: *I hear the word God proclaims; the Lord—for he proclaims peace to his people. Salvation is near for those who fear him and there will be the glory of dwelling in our land.*

All: **Kindness and truth shall meet; justice and peace shall embrace.**

Leader: *Truth shall spring out of the earth, and justice shall look down from heaven.*

All: **The Lord himself will give blessings; our land shall yield its increase. Justice shall walk before him, and prepare the way of his steps.**

Leader: *Let us invoke the presence of God:*

**Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit and renew the face of the earth.**

**O God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit have instructed the hearts of the faithful grant that by the same Spirit we may truly wise and ever enjoy His consolations. Through Christ, our Lord. Amen.**

**First Reading** [Isaiah 40 (1-5), (9-11)]

***Comfort, give comfort to my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that her service is at an end, her guilt is expiated; indeed, she has received from the hand of the Lord double for all her sins.***

***A voice cries out:***

***In the desert prepare the way of the Lord! Make straight in the wasteland a highway for our God! Every valley shall be filled in, every mountain and hill shall be made low; the rugged land shall be made a plain, the rough country, a broad valley. Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together; for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.***

***Go up on to a high mountain, Zion, herald of glad tidings; cry out at the top of your voice, Jerusalem, herald of good news! Fear not to cry out and say to the cities of Judah: Here is your God! Here comes with power the Lord God, who rules by his strong arm; here is his reward with him, his recompense before him. Like a shepherd he feeds his flock; in his arms he gathers the lambs, carrying them in his bosom, and leading the ewes with care.***

The book of Isaiah is composed in three sections, with both the second ("deutero-Isaiah") and third parts being written by disciples of the prophet. We find the first verses of this reading in the beginning of the deutero-Isaiah in a section some scholars like to call the "book of consolation". This was addressed to the Israelites during their exile in Babylon and the author sought to restore hope to the people of God in their time of distress.

The message of this particular text could actually be divided into three points. The first is **consolation** that is not understood as a gesture of sympathy toward those who suffer, but rather as an active solidarity that helps to solve the needs of those suffering. The second message is that of **the path**. The desert will be opened to become a "highway" for the people to return by a leveled road without obstacles. However, we later realize that the text does not talk about the return of the people, but the return of God. The glory of God will return to Jerusalem. Finally, there is also the message of the **announcement**. In Greek, the messenger of the good news is an "evangelist" and the good news is that God in person will be the shepherd of Israel.



- (1) After many centuries, the actions of man leave much to be desired in the world. The path that leads to happiness has not yet been built. What image in this text becomes a symbol of a safe and reliable way for true happiness?
- (2) Throughout the Bible, many promises are made to us. Can you recall somewhere in the Scriptures where we have been promised a life free of obstacles, a "paved way"?
- (3) There are many flowers in nature. However, the Rose is the queen, the most remembered at the time of giving flowers. But the Rose comes with thorns, while other flowers do not. Reflect on what this means in regards to our faith.

### Second Reading [2 Peter 3 (8-14)]

***Do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years and a thousand years like one day. The Lord does not delay his promise, as some regard "delay," but he is patient with you, not wishing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a mighty roar and the elements will be dissolved by fire, and the earth and everything done on it will be found out.***

***Since everything is to be dissolved in this way, what sort of persons ought you to be, conducting yourselves in holiness and devotion, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved in flames and the elements melted by fire. But according to his promise we await new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. Therefore, beloved, since you await these things, be eager to be found without spot or blemish before him, at peace.***

It is believed that the second letter of Peter is the last part of the New Testament to be written and it was composed in the 2nd century. (For this reason, although it is called the Letter of Peter, it was probably not written by the first Pope). By then, there was already a third generation of Christians who expected the coming of the Savior, and doubts arose as they began to ask the question "why is the Lord delaying the fulfillment of his promise?"

The author says something powerful that can be easily missed if we read the text too quickly: "*the Lord is patient with you, not wishing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance*" The Lord knows that we need time to deepen our conversion and wonderfully enough, we are given time. However, this does not mean a blank check, but rather we receive an opportunity to seize faith with wisdom and passion. No one knows when this second coming will occur, nor the moment when we will be accountable to the Lord. For this reason, the text concludes, "*be eager to be found without spot or blemish before him, at peace*".

- (1) Think about the following sentence: "The time of God is not like ours." What do you think this means? How have you seen its truth in your own life?
- (2) Imagine that your relationship with God was not intimate and rather than having patience, He always takes the opportunity to pass judgment on you. What would be the result of such a relationship? How would your life look different?
- (3) It is very common to see signs saying John 3:16 at sporting events, on shopping bags, etc. What's the meaning of the verse? Why is it so universally known?
- (4) Read John 3:17. How does it deepen your understanding of the reading and the way we are called to be in relationship with God?

### Gospel [Mark 1 (1-8)]

***The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ the Son of God.***

***As it is written in Isaiah the prophet: Behold, I am sending my messenger ahead of you; he will prepare your way.***

***A voice of one crying out in the desert: "Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths."***

***John the Baptist appeared in the desert proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. People of the whole Judean countryside and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the Jordan River as they acknowledged their sins.***

***John was clothed in camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist. He fed on locusts and wild honey.***

***And this is what he proclaimed: "One mightier than I is coming after me. I am not worthy to stoop and loosen the thongs of his sandals. I have baptized you with water; he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."***



## Commentary

The first verse of the Gospel of Mark tells us that this is "the gospel" of Jesus Christ, which was the start of a new literary genre among Holy Scriptures. In those times, the expressions 'Messiah' and 'Son of God' were not understood as we know them today. For the Christians of the Third Millennium, both expressions did not mean the same thing. The Messiah was the savior of the people and Jesus of Nazareth was the liberator so cherished by his contemporaries. On the other hand, the Son of God brought the salvation that comes from God.

Recalling what we read in the first reading, the salvation of which this Gospel speaks is not like the return from exile in Babylon. The salvation that Jesus Christ the Son of God brings is much larger: He overcame evil, disease and death. Christ's arrival was announced by John the Baptist in the desert and the moral conversion that the Baptist preaches "prepares the way" for Him. This conversion is needed to take advantage of the salvation offered to us. It is not a "moment" in our lives or a spiritual retreat in which our eyes are opened and we decide to be Christians. Conversion is a process that never ends and it is a way of life. This way of life is what the Church invites us to review and renew this Advent.

(1) Read Ezekiel 18 (21-23). Reflect on the passage as it relates to this Gospel.

(2) Now to read the next verse: Ezekiel 18 (24). Share your thoughts on how it more fully connects to the text.

(3) How have you worked with God to "prepare the way" in your own life and how have others led you to the Lord?

(4) How do we imitate the example of these people who have contributed to our closeness to the Lord? Could we be a sort of John the Baptist to others?

(5) We prepare to celebrate the birth of Jesus. Imagine that you are the crib which will host the child God. Could you say that there are no sharp thorns in the cradle? What would you have to do to be worthy to receive such glorious visitor? Is there any "noise" in your life that prevents you from listening to the cry of John the Baptist to "prepare the way for the Lord"?

## CLOSING PRAYER

Leader: *Lord of the day and night, of the beginning and of the end: At the closing of this meeting, once again we lift up our hearts to You, divine source of all life.*

All: **We thank you for the gifts you have bestowed on us. We thank you for the love expressed in companionship and understanding, mutual respect and shared ideas. We give you thanks for your holy power that will help us in our concerns that we have shared. For these and all the gifts that come from You, we give you thanks.**

Leader: *Lord hear our prayers* (attendees can propose their own needs of prayer)

All: **In the same way in which we have being blessed by your presence as we meet, we ask now to bless our safe return to our homes. May your holy blessing be over us + in the name of the Father .....**

Leader: *May the King of the eternal glory gather us together in His heavenly banquet. Amen.*

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