

HOMILY – SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT “B” 2020

“Prepare the way of the Lord.” Today in Mark’s gospel, we hear the words of the great Old Testament prophet Isaiah: **“Behold, I am sending my messenger ahead of you; he will prepare your way; a voice crying in the desert; ‘prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths.’”**

Saint Mark and the Church place John the Baptist as the one crying in the desert. In many ways John is the voice of Advent, the voice that points to Jesus as the One to transform our lives. John the Baptist is a very unique biblical figure. He understood what his role was – **“preparing the way of the Lord.”** Even though he attracted a large following, he never allowed his ego to get in the way of what his mission was: **“I baptize you in water for repentance...The one who comes after me is more powerful than I... I am not fit to carry his sandals.”** He lived like a hermit in the desert, wearing a garment made of camel-hair with a leather loin-cloth around his waist. He was not afraid to speak out against those who lived false lives: **“Brood of vipers ... produce fruit in keeping with repentance.”**

I would guess it would be safe to say that it would be hard to find a Christmas card with John the Baptist’s words about repentance. In the same way there are no Christmas jingles that I know of about John the Baptist. But his message needs to be heard. He speaks about getting rid of the bumps and holes in our life to make a straight path for the Lord. Just as site preparation is very important before any building is started, spiritual preparation is what John the Baptist is calling us to do.

Christmas time evokes strong hopes and dreams in our lives: thoughts of family, friendships and fellowship. We dream of a world of peace and harmony where people care about each other or at least respect each other and live in dignity as the people of God. We may even dream of building great spiritual structures in our life, a powerful spirituality and the experience of Christ’s grace and purpose in our life.

Are we willing to do the site preparation? Are we willing to get rid of the potholes and bumps in our life? What are we willing to give up in order to prepare for solid spiritual construction in our lives?

It would be wonderful if the joy and peace of Christmas came as easy as putting up decorations, turning on Christmas music and stringing out the lights. But Christmas that happens so easily disappears just as easily.

The deeper Christmas which is a rebirth of fidelity to the Lord Jesus, a deeper appreciation of our Christian dignity and mission, a renewed welcoming of Christ and his Gospel proclamation into our life requires preparation.

In the middle of this crowded season, let us make room for John the Baptist and his message of repentance because he keeps us real.

John the Baptist reminds us that we should be getting ready not just for another holiday season but to renew our lives in the power of Christ by getting rid of the obstacles that block our full experience of the Lord's grace and power in our lives. He reminds us we can change. He calls us again this year in this crowded Christmas season to take away one or two stones that block the full flow of grace into our lives. He prepares us not for the temporary seasonal cheer but for deep joy in the Lord that comes from experiencing release from sin and a new life in Christ. John the Baptist's message of repentance carries the promise of a new life, a new future in Christ that is now open to each one of us.

Christmas is a day we must prepare for in a spiritual manner if we want to experience the spiritual joy of God's great love and be more ready to welcome his future coming. Otherwise when Christmas day ends we'll be saying to ourselves: "Boy, am I glad that's over." Christmas will be for any of us only what we make of it. Let's do the preparation and welcome the Lord with great joy.