

## **Homily Notes for Sunday, Dec 6, 2020    Deacon John Ragland**

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

With this Gospel selection, we begin in earnest this Year of Grace, in which we, for the most part, read each Sunday from the Holy Gospel according to Saint Mark. In order for us to truly grasp the impact of Mark's Gospel, we might wish to first review a few items concerning Mark's Gospel.

Mark's Gospel is simple, clear, and direct. Look at the first line of the Gospel, which we proclaim this Sunday: "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." There's no nice prologue situating things historically, like in Matthew's Gospel or that of Saint Luke. There's no prologue which begins in the depths of time and eternity like Saint John presents us. It is a simple declarative sentence, one which tells us all that we need to know. It sets us up with the single most important fact that we have to have as we begin our reading of this Gospel — it is the good news of Jesus, the anointed one who is the Son of God, indeed God himself. Like I said, it's simple, clear, and direct.

With this in mind, we face a challenge then in our prayer lives, as we begin this new Year of Grace 2021 — can we, in our prayer, in our dialogue with the Lord, as we speak to him and as we listen attentively in the movements of our hearts, be simple, clear, and direct?

Friday was the Memorial of Saint John Damascene, Priest and Doctor. And prayer is, according to the great Saint John Damascene, the "raising of one's mind and heart to God or the requesting of good things from God." It is simply talking to the one who knows us better than we even know ourselves. We need in our prayer to be honest with God and to be honest with ourselves. Prayer consists ACTS: Adoration (recognizing that God is God, that we are not, and thank God for that), Contrition (recognizing that we are sinners and that we need God to save us), Thanksgiving (recognizing that everything in our life is a gift, free and undeserved from God, even the crosses which we have to bear), and Supplication (recognizing the difference between our wants and our needs). God knows us; he knows the desires of our human hearts and he wishes to give us everything that we need for our salvation. In our prayer this year, perhaps we can be like Saint Mark in his writing style in the Gospel — to be simple, clear, and direct. After all, the Lord, in his goodness, his wisdom, and his omnipotence, already knows!

We journey during Advent. The Christian takes a special journey in order to discover the greatest treasure of all — Jesus Christ. We should know that peoples long before our

time took similar journeys in order to find God. We hear about them in today's readings. Isaiah was a prophet who spoke to the Jewish people, both before the exile and while in exile in Babylon. The people had been away from their homeland for a long time; many probably thought God had abandoned them. On the contrary, however, Isaiah tells the people that if they want to find God and return home they must build a highway. It's not a highway made of cement, asphalt, and stone, like the roads of today. No, this is a highway in their minds. The reason the people could not find God was, that their minds were too full of other things. Isaiah tells the people to remove those things that are unimportant, and make a path to God that is level, smooth, and straight. Then the people will find God and they'll return home.

John the Baptist was another prophet who delivered a similar message to a different group of people. John spoke to the Jews of his day, and told them that they, too, must build a highway in order to find God. Jesus, the one for whom John was to prepare the way, was present, but the people would not find him, unless they could level off the mountains, fill in the valleys, sweep the path smooth, and make it straight.

We must do the best we can to make level, smooth, and straight, our highway that leads to God. So, the church gives us Advent, as a time to prepare ourselves in our journey toward God.

All of us, like climbing a tree; we're climbing toward our goal. God willing, we'll make it to the top. But when we get there, if we turn upside down, and look out -- what will we see? Will we see only one day -- Christmas -- or will we behold all of the possibilities that God places before us? The answer may only be found by an inward journey. So, strengthened by the Eucharist, we'll be able to see with better and clearer vision what God gives us. Therefore, as our Advent journey continues, let's make the road straight. Let's make it level and smooth. Let's prepare ourselves for the coming of the Lord! Amen.