

## **PREPARING THE WAY: 2<sup>ND</sup> SUNDAY OF ADVENT (C)**

A brand new priest went to the lectern to preach his first homily after ordination. He was as nervous as a kitten. But when he reached the lectern he broke into a broad smile. Someone had left a note for him: 'What's it to be, man? Will you give us heaven, or give us hell?' Well, I like to give you the gospel, i.e. good news from God, news we have on God's authority, news of hope, news of encouragement. The good news that our God loves us, the good news that our God is always with us, the good news that our God is never finished with us, the good news that our God is going to prepare us for both Christmas and Christ's Second Coming by changing us, the good news as Luke puts it from the prophet Isaiah, that 'all are going to see the salvation of God'.

Of course, God's presence and action require our cooperation. John the messenger of God tells us what this includes. It includes repentance. This is more than sorrow for our sins, even for the best of motives. True repentance requires an about-face, a real change in what we think about our world, ourselves, and our relationships. It requires a thoroughgoing change in the ways we think, feel, value, speak, act and live. It involves nothing less than taking on the mind and heart of Jesus. True repentance, John also says, demands an outward sign of interior change. So John says, 'be baptized. Have your sins washed away in the waters of repentance, and get a life, a new life, a new way of living'. For us it means letting the meaning of our Christian baptism keep bubbling over into new and better ways of living and relating - to ourselves, to other human beings - especially poor, sad and lonely people - to our environment, and to our God.

So, letting God save us is a matter of co-operating with the action of God by preparing the way of the Lord. Unlike me, many of you are mothers and fathers.

You know what it's like to prepare for the arrival of a new baby. A room has to be cleaned out of all useless junk. It has to be washed or wiped clean from top to bottom. Usually a new coat of paint has to be applied or new wallpaper. A blind to keep the sun out of baby's face has to be hung, and pretty curtains put up to decorate the space. A bassinette, a cot, a pram and a stroller, must all be around. Fresh, soft baby clothes are to await baby's arrival. Maybe some soft toys must be added to the scene, and some shapes hung from the ceiling to capture Baby's attention and to keep Baby calm and content. There is just so much to be done.

In ancient times preparing for the visit of a king to one of his cities or towns would be just as demanding. The king would send a courier to people to tell them to mend the roads, fill in the pot-holes, and smooth out the bumps, so that the king's journey might be as easy, pleasant and trouble-free as possible.

It is this image that Luke uses to describe the mission of John the Baptist. The word of God comes to him as prophet, as messenger of God to the crowds who go out to the desert to hear

him speak. 'The King is coming,' John says in effect, 'So mend God's roads to you, by straightening out your lives.'

So, in the light of our celebration of Christ's first coming on Christmas Day and of our hope in his Second Coming at the end of time, we have a double task before Christmas 2018:- 1. to rejoice and give thanks that we do not save ourselves, but that our God is coming to save us, and 2. With the help of the grace, the presence of God to us, to fill in those potholes, level out those bumps, and remove every road-block that is getting in the way of God coming to visit us. All our efforts to prepare the way of the Lord will then make it so much easier for God to do his work of coming to save, transform, change and renew us.

Concretely, what are those road-blocks we need to shift? In your case, you know what they are. In my case, I know what they are. So, let us make our own Paul's prayer in our Second Reading today! May our meeting with Christ in our holy communion with him lead us to understand and appreciate that '[God] who has begun this good work in you [and me] will carry it through to completion, right up to the day of Christ Jesus', both at Christmas and on the last day. May he find you and me, then, as Paul puts it, both 'pure and blameless'. How might that be? Because with the help of God we will have, removed 'the things that hinder us from receiving Christ with joy....' (Opening Prayer) When that day comes, then, may all our tears and all our struggles be turned into whoops of joy and shouts of victory!

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