

Brothers and sisters, the theme that runs through the readings is **preparing the way for the Lord**. In the first reading, we heard a beautiful prophecy about God liberating the Jews from captivity in Babylon, "Prepare in the wilderness a way for the Lord. Make a straight highway for our God across the desert. Let every valley be filled in, every mountain and hill be laid low, Let every cliff become a plain.... Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed" (Is. 40:3-5). This prophecy has great meaning when we apply it to our own hearts. It is in our own hearts that we need to prepare a way for the Lord. It is in our hearts that we need to make a straight highway for God. It is the **valleys of sin** in our own hearts that are to be filled with God's mercy and healing, and the **mountains and hills of pride** in our own hearts that are to become low. Mountains of self-importance, of greed, of whatever makes us think we are above all humans. God is searching for us and wants to hold us against his breast.

On this second Sunday of Advent, John the Baptist makes an appearance and shouts out to us; "**prepare the way of the Lord!**" This is the fulfillment of a prophecy from Isaiah seven hundred years earlier when Isaiah told the people of Israel that when it is the time of the Messiah's coming a voice will cry out to prepare them. When John the Baptist makes the announcement to get ready for the Lord, he makes it clear that the highway for the Lord leads to our hearts. John the Baptist takes his prophetic call seriously and lives **a life of prayer and fasting**. His message is a simple message, "**repent**." He does a baptism of repentance for those who accept his call. John's baptism is meant to prepare them to recognize and accept Jesus as Messiah and Lord.

Through the baptism of repentance that John the Baptist preached, the people were forgiven of their sins. Here we hear of **the people confessing their sins**. We see the foundation of the Church's **Sacrament of Reconciliation**. The people were transforming their lives, becoming righteous in preparation to receive Jesus Christ. Equally, when one receives the Sacrament of Reconciliation, he or she is made righteous in the eyes of God, in order to receive Jesus in the Sacrament of the Most Holy Eucharist. Again the Church's Sacrament of Reconciliation cleanses our soul, mind and heart, so that our bodies become a suitable Divine dwelling.

Today's Gospel Reading finishes by telling us that while John baptized the people with water, Jesus baptized those He loves with the Holy Spirit (Mk. 1:8). Through Christ, we are sanctified to become in His likeness, holy, righteous, obedient and submissive to God's Divine will, shining in love towards others and bearing the fruit of the Holy Spirit. Our baptism in the Holy Spirit is ongoing, being reflected by our living faith in Christ, by our walking the path of Christ, by our patient endurance, by our bearing of the daily crosses that the Lord permits to come our way, and forgiving those who trespass against us.

The second reading today gives us a warning. God is patient with us now in order to give us time to repent but the time for repentance will not last. The Lord is not being slow to carry out his promises...rather he is being patient with us, wanting nobody to be lost and everybody to be brought to repentance....So then, my dear friends, while you are waiting, do your best to live blameless and unsullied lives so that he will find you at peace (2 Pet 3:9-12,14).

This leads us to ask ourselves the question, "How am I preparing the way of the Lord, by building that highway for the Lord to get into my heart?" No matter what God has called us to do it takes humility, sincerity of heart, and fortitude to do it well. It involves filling in the emptiness of valley, and cutting away the mountains that blind us. It means removing detours that we sometimes take so as to avoid conversion, and removing the toll booths that we put up to make travel costly. In doing this well, we are making way for the Lord. The Lord doesn't limit his visits to us to Christmas. He is present to us always and the more we work on our highway the easier it is for us to see him.

Finally, dear friends, we are living now in this time of mercy when we have an opportunity to repent. Let us receive as much grace as we can from God during this time of Advent. The Lord has no limits to what he wants to give us; it is we who put limits on what he wants to give us. The Lord is waiting to receive us in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, to take us in his arms and hold us close to his breast. Let us pray as much as we can during this season of Advent. Christmas will lack its full meaning if we do not prepare in our own hearts a way for the Lord. It is in our hearts that we need to make a straight highway for God. It is the valleys of sin in our own hearts that are to be filled with God's mercy and healing, and the mountains and hills of pride in our own hearts that are to become low. So that he will be born into our heart. Amen!