

Brothers and sisters, the message that runs through the readings is that we should **prepare the way for the Lord**, whose coming we are awaiting (Lk.3:4). John the Baptist's message for us this Advent is that, "**Prepare the way of the Lord**", has long been understood as summing up the message of the Advent season. The Gospel has made it crystal clear that the person who heralds the coming of Jesus as Messiah and Lord is John the Baptist. He comes in the spirit of Elijah to proclaim the message that the Messiah is coming, and that indeed the Messiah is here, and he knew in his day that the Messiah was living among men (Jn.1:11). John understood, even if all of his followers did not understand, that his role was a limited one, his job was to proclaim the Messiah, and he was to prepare people's hearts and minds for this reality. In fact, preparation to meet Christ is very important, because it will help our spiritual growth. Now, most families are preparing themselves for Christmas when we start celebrating Advent, for it is a time of wonder and joy. As we are buying things for Christmas, let us not forget the most important thing in life, things of spiritual value, things that make us holy...

The First Reading, Baruch 5:1-9, Baruch's prophecy echoes in a post-exilic context much of the message of consolation contained in Second Isaiah (Isaiah 40-66). Foreseeing the return to Jerusalem of the Israelites, who had been exiled and scattered in foreign cities, the prophet tells the city to get ready to witness this wonderful homecoming. The exiles will return like **princes**, put on the splendor of glory from God forever: wrapped in the cloak of justice from God, bear on your head the **mitre** that displays the glory of the eternal name... In a broader sense, the passage urges all who are struggling with faith in an alien culture to stand up, to have **confidence, to be strong**. The prophet directs our attention toward how expectation and anticipation of the Messiah find fulfilment in the birth of the child in Bethlehem. Baruch's image of flattening the high mountains and filling out the valleys was frequent in First Testament times. God will take **all other obstacles on their way and transformed the desert into a paradise to make their journey a delight**. It derived from the custom of having a herald precede a king, when the king was going on a journey, to forewarn the inhabitants of his arrival so that they could repair their ill—kept roads. This high hope of "**home coming**" can also be an expectation at the messianic age. The Gospel for today, Luke 3:1-6, John the Baptist announce its imminent fulfilment. He is "the voice" foretold by Isaiah (40:3), the one who cries in the wilderness, "Prepare the way for the Lord".

Beyond the vision of Baruch, what John sees is not just the return of the dispersed Israelites, but the "way of *the Lord*". At the head of the new humanity, restoring it to freedom, will be the figure of Jesus. Those whom he gathers and leads will be "returned ones," not now in the physical sense of returnees from exile, but in the biblical sense of "**return**", which also denotes **conversion of heart**. Once again, this Advent, John summons us to the change of heart whereby the Church becomes ever more deeply the forerunner of a human race making its homecoming to God and its own true humanity. The vocation of the Church, as a whole and its local communities, is to be the "**light of the nations**", so "all humankind may see the salvation of God". St Luke begins his narrative of Jesus' public ministry with John the Baptist, who was straightening out the crooked paths of human hearts and levelling the **valleys of weakness and selfishness; and mountains and hills of pride and arrogance** to prepare them for Jesus. John's personality, conviction, and enthusiasm for his message caused people to overlook his odd dress and to receive the salvation God is offering them.

Paul, in the Second Reading, prayed that **our love may increase** ever more in knowledge and every kind of perception, to discern what is of value, **so that we may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ (Phi.1:9-10)**. But we should not fail to notice his stress upon "improving knowledge" and "deepening perception" so that the community will always be able to "recognize what is best". To ask ourselves what leads us to God. The fact is that things that lead us away from God give us joy, but it will bring us an untold sadness. Advent is a time of sharpening our sensitivity to the summons and calls of the Spirit.

*In conclusion, Beloved in Christ, let us remember 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 us, not wishing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. God's patience should not be seen as an excuse for presumption, but, rather, a time for repentance. This is no time to be saying, "Later." It is a time to be serious about repenting and about preparing to meet the Lord. This Advent, through prayer and repentance let us change our life-style so that we may inherit the kingdom promised us. Amen!*