

2nd Sunday of Advent (B)
(Isaiah 40:1-5.9-11 / Mark 1:1-8)
07.12.2014

Dear brothers and sisters,

Today, it is John the Baptist who joins us and accompanies us in our Advent journey. The beginning of St Mark's gospel that we have just listened to quotes verbatim a verse from today's first reading from the Prophet Isaiah:

“A voice cries in the wilderness: Prepare a way for the Lord, make his paths straight”.

That voice that cries in the wilderness is the voice of **John the Baptist** who invites us to prepare a way for the Lord in our lives. John the Baptist wants us to be ready to welcome the Lord, not only when He will come back in glory at the end of time, but already here and now in the many ways the Lord does not cease to come to visit us.

This exhortation of John the Baptist to prepare a way for the Lord is familiar to us. We are used to listening to it every year during the Advent season. But what does John the Baptist really mean when he invites us “to prepare a way for the Lord”?

The ministry of John the Baptist takes place in the **wilderness**. In the bible, the wilderness is a place of solitude and prayer, a place where we can meet with the Lord and receive his graces. But the wilderness is also a place where we have to fight against the devil who tries to undermine our relationship with the Lord. Perhaps mention of the wilderness in both readings today is an invitation addressed to us to give more time to personal prayer, an invitation to wait for the Lord in prayer. Without a regular personal prayer life, our expectation and hope for the Lord's coming fades away. We miss His coming. Our life of faith disintegrates.

Let us not be afraid to take time to pray! Let us be courageous enough to take time to pray! To pray requires of us that we make a choice. When we choose to pray, we renounce to do something else. This can be a costly decision, but it is the way to life.

“**A voice** cries in the wilderness...” If there is a voice who cries to us, this is the sign that there is somebody speaking to us. We have to listen to that voice. The best way to do it is to nourish our personal prayer by a listening of the Word of God, especially the prophets who during this Advent season enlighten powerfully our hope and expectation. If we had to choose one out of all the prophets, Isaiah would be probably our first choice. Isaiah, the messianic prophet par excellence, teaches us how to be ready to welcome the Lord.

“A voice cries: Prepare a way for the Lord”. If we are called to prepare a way for the Lord, it is because somewhere there is an obstruction on the way. It is for this reason that John the Baptist proclaims **a baptism of repentance** in the wilderness so that we may confess our sins and become ready to welcome the Lord. This baptism of repentance is essentially a call to conversion. What kind of conversion do we need to practice if we want to clear the way for the Lord? Perhaps the main obstruction to the coming of the Lord in our lives is **ourselves**. We have a tendency to give ourselves first place and

occupy centre stage. We place ourselves at the centre of our relationships with the Lord, with others and also with ourselves, instead of allowing the Lord Himself to be at the centre of all these relationships and shape them. We are so caught up with ourselves, our ideas, our plans, our agendas and our principles! Nevertheless, the one necessary thing required of us is to welcome the one who comes to save us, to give him the first place in our minds and hearts, and allow Him to show us the way to fullness of life. If we consent to that kind of conversion, there is no doubt that we are preparing a way for the Lord in our lives today.

During these days leading up to Christmas, we shall be hailed again and again by others with these words: **Are you ready for Christmas?** And probably we will ask them the same question! The meaning of this question is: Have you done all your Christmas shopping? Have you sent all your Christmas cards? Have you bought your turkey, your ham and all the stuff which goes with them? The danger of the question: "Are you ready for Christmas?" is to reduce Christmas to its preparation and its celebration. These are important but they should be only the expression of a much greater mystery: the coming of the Lord into the world. We are not called to create Christmas but to welcome it. John the Baptist invites us to create a free space within our hearts where the Lord will be able to come and bring us his salvation. During these days leading up to Christmas, the point is not so much to do something ourselves, but to allow the Lord to do something within us and for us. We are waiting for the Lord, the God of surprises, who comes to do something new in us. Christmas should be above all God's work within us and for us and not our own work for Him. So: "Are we ready for Christmas?" Yes, we are ready if with open hands, open hearts and open minds we are waiting for the surprising visit of the Lord.

The salvation which the Lord comes to offer us is a revelation of God's love for us as a people and personally, the forgiveness of our sins and a share in his victory over death through his resurrection. Come, Lord Jesus! We wait for your coming!