

2nd Sunday of Advent (C)
(Baruch 5:1-9 / Luke 3:1-6)
08.12.2024
We are Pilgrims

A verse from the prophet Baruch brings to the fore a theme which is essential to our Christian identity: the theme of the path and the fact that we are a pilgrim people who are supposed to keep on walking. The prophet Baruch announced that the people of God will be able to “walk in safety under the glory of God.”

For all of us, there is a road to walk, a journey to accomplish, a distance to cover. According to St John, it is clear that we “ought to walk just as Jesus Christ walked” (1 Jn 2:6), in truth and in love. The Advent season is the time in which we are called to reject what is darkness and walk towards the light. For St John we find ourselves before a choice: either we hate one another, and walk in darkness; or we love one another, and walk by Christ’s light (cf. Rev 21:24).

There are two options that would be wrong for us: either to settle where we are and become bystanders, seated by the side of the road, enjoying cosily what we have, shedding a tear of pity for the misfortunes of the world; or else to become lonely hikers, self-concerned, focused solely on the goal that we want to arrive at, relying on our own strength and abilities to attain it.

In both cases, we miss sadly on the whole the point of Advent and Christmas. For us to walk the road means that we become the road for the Lord, the road that he will use to reach out to the world, to all our brothers and sisters in humanity.

In many Churches, during these weeks, we sing *O Come, O Come Emmanuel*. The reality is that these are empty words if they do not imply that we allow God’s grace to convert and transform our lives in such a way that Christ is able to walk in the midst of his people through us.

To make way for the Lord implies that we check what in our lives can be an obstacle to the coming of the Lord.

It also implies that we are careful not to put stumbling-blocks on the path of our fellow-men and women. Clearly, as persons and as Churches, we have to ask ourselves: do we help one another to walk freely and peacefully the path that leads to life?

We must acknowledge that, all too often, in our communities there are judgemental attitudes and, in our countries, political decisions which make the mountains more difficult to climb, the roads rougher and the ways more winding for many men and women.

The Christian faith journey is eminently personal as well as communitarian and so while we cannot remain indifferent to what is happening throughout the world, we must also see what is happening close to us in our families and neighbourhoods. At the moment, despite the prophecy of the prophet Baruch, there are many people, in Gaza, in Ukraine, in Nicaragua, in the USA and among our relatives who do not feel that they can “walk in safety under the glory of God.” There are millions of children, women and men who live in refugee camps and whose future is clouded by insecurity and powerlessness, who desperately long for the day when they will be able, as Baruch promised it, to walk escorted by God’s mercy and integrity.

As we journey towards the celebration of Christmas, let us not become so self-centred that we are blind to those whose pace is slower, more difficult and challenging, those who are heavily burdened and those who have lost their way.

We must remember that Jesus had no choice but to walk slowly when he was carrying the cross, stumbling and falling along the way. We must remember that he was not afraid to walk the road to Emmaus, which was the wrong path, a way of disappointment and excommunication for the two disciples.

Jesus promised us to be with us always, whether we are on the right path or when we are wandering on the wrong track.

I quoted St John already, that passage in which he wrote that we “ought to walk just as Jesus Christ walked” (1 Jn 2:6).

St Peter helps us to understand what it means to walk as Jesus walked when he said: “God poured out on him the Holy Spirit and power. He went everywhere, doing good” (Ac 10:38).

Through our baptism, we all have been anointed with the Holy Spirit and with power. So we are neither tourists nor wanderers, but pilgrims commissioned to do good, to work for the common good.

The expression “to do good” is vague enough to encompass a huge number of concrete positive actions. At the end of 2024, it may be particularly significant and urgent for all of us to be “artisans of peace” (Mt 5:9). The forces of division and rejection, of self-centredness and violence are dangerously at work in our countries and even in some corners of our Churches.

Many centuries ago, the prophet Isaiah already lamented: “The way of peace they do not know, and there is no justice in their paths. Their roads they have made crooked; no one who walks in them knows peace.” (59:8)

For us today, in our families and communities, to walk as Jesus walked, he who is our peace (cf. Eph 2:14), is to be peace builders, ministers of reconciliation (cf. 2 Co 5:18). We need to map the road to peace in our hearts and around us, to help one another at all the crossroads of life and to remind ourselves, over and over again, that peace is not an easy way, it takes efforts and creativity, it requires justice and truth. It entails perseverance in making the small steps which build up the kingdom of God here and now.

In the coming weeks and every day of our lives, may the Lord give us light and “guide our feet into the way of peace” (Lk 1:79) because, as the author of the book of Proverbs wrote: “A heart at peace gives life.” (14:30)