

10 December 2017 (2nd Sunday in Advent, Year B)

Isaiah 40:1-5,9-11; Psalm 84(85):9-14; 2Peter 3:8-14; Mark 1:1-8.

Prepare a way for the Lord, make his paths straight!

The Lord is coming, not at Christmas, but in our daily life and at the end of our own life. The question is not if he will come, but when. The Lord comes at a time that we least expect, hence the need to be always awake and prepared.

On this second Sunday in our journey towards Christmas, we are invited to meet John the Baptist, the one sent to prepare the way for the Lord's coming. The Baptist lived in the wilderness and preached that the Lord was near. The gospel according to Mark compares John to two great prophets in the Old Testament, Elijah and Isaiah; in their time both had proclaimed that the Lord was coming to be with his people.

The coming of someone of importance requires great preparation; the coming of the Lord requires us to be fully prepared! John suggested that the best way to prepare for the Lord's coming was by turning away from sin and back to God. He did this by inviting those who gathered around him to come forward and be washed in the waters of the Jordan. People were symbolically immersed (plunged / baptised) in the water, leaving behind their old life and being reborn to a new life. This baptism with water was accompanied by a confession, a naming of sins.

Sin stops us from seeing God. In the book of Genesis we have the story of the first man and first woman who disobeyed God. When God came to talk to them, they could not face him, because by their disobedience they had turned their faces away from God. Now they were ashamed and could no longer stand naked in front of God, they had to hide their sinfulness (Gen 3:8-10).

Like in the book of Genesis, God still comes and walks in our midst. Jesus is Emmanuel, God-with-us born in Bethlehem two thousand years ago, but he is also Emmanuel today. God lives in each one of us, in our sisters and brothers, in those who are less fortunate, poor and needy. How do I prepare myself to meet this God? My sin turns me away from God. Advent is a good time for me to repent, turn back to God and start again.

True repentance requires me to acknowledge and name my sinfulness. I need not be afraid because God is all-merciful but in order for me to be able to turn back to God I need to know what sins are holding me back. This is why the sacrament of reconciliation requires us to name our sins before we can be reconciled back with God.

As we prepare for the coming of the Lord, which we celebrate in a special way at Christmas, we are invited to approach the sacrament of reconciliation so that when we meet God in our every day life we can have the courage to face him and be ready for the big day when we meet him face to face at our death.

Fr Mario