



WEEKLY GOSPEL REFLECTION



2ND SUNDAY OF ADVENT, CYCLE B

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A voice of one crying out in the desert: "Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths." Mark 1:3

We turn today to the beginning of Mark's Gospel. Mark proclaims the witness of John the Baptist as the beginning of the good news of Jesus. We recall that John the Baptist is considered to be the "*hinge prophet*," the last prophet of the Old Testament because he was born before Jesus, and the first prophet of the New Testament, because he is witness to the fulfillment of scripture, proclaiming that the messiah has arrived.

The quotation attributed to Isaiah is actually a compilation of phrases from several Old Testament prophets, including Isaiah. Mark's approach serves to link the Baptist with God's eschatological promises and with Elijah. Mark changes Isaiah's text, putting "*in the wilderness*" with the "*voice*" rather than with the way of the Lord, and thus makes it match the life of the Baptist more closely.

The description of John's clothing also serves to link him with Elijah. John deliberately dressed like Elijah for two reasons: one, this way he was easily recognizable wearing a prophet's proper dress, and second, it helped the people of the day make the connection.

John calls the people of his time, and us, to repentance for the forgiveness of sins. Repentance requires us to be honest about the times we have fallen short in loving God and our neighbor as the Lord commands. Knowing that we are sinners is a necessary step in recognizing our need for the forgiveness God has graciously offered us through his Son, whose coming into the world we prepare to celebrate.

The main emphasis in Mark's treatment, however, is on the proclamation of Jesus as the one to come who surpasses John and whose baptism with the Holy Spirit surpasses John's baptism of mere water.

The words quoted from Isaiah use the image of preparing the way for a monarch traveling through the wilderness where there is no road. A crew of workers precedes him, making the way passable for his chariot, "*Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths.*" (Mark 1:3) So the Baptist calls us to prepare.

In reflecting on this passage this week, it is good to renew our practice of the daily Ignatian EXAMEN, giving thanks for the glory of the day, examining our conscience to prepare for the Sacrament of Reconciliation, being inspired that our path was illuminated by our faith, and making a resolve to "*make straight the path*" in the new day.

It is good to remember that Mark emphasizes the beginning of the good news of Jesus. The text conveys an excitement that must have been experienced by those who heard John preach. As we place ourselves in the setting, it stirs the same excitement in us.

*The day of the Lord is near! Prepare the way for him!
Prepare yourselves for his coming!*

A Reading from the Holy Gospel according to Mark

The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ the Son of God.

As it is written in Isaiah the prophet:

Behold, I am sending my messenger ahead of you;
he will prepare your way.
A voice of one crying out in the desert:
“Prepare the way of the Lord,
make straight his paths.”

John the Baptist appeared in the desert
proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.
People of the whole Judean countryside
and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem
were going out to him
and were being baptized by him in the Jordan River
as they acknowledged their sins.
John was clothed in camel’s hair,
with a leather belt around his waist.
He fed on locusts and wild honey.

And this is what he proclaimed:

*“One mightier than I is coming after me.
I am not worthy to stoop and loosen the thongs of his sandals.
I have baptized you with water;
he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”*

The Gospel of the Lord

