

Prepare the way of the Lord

Lectio Divina of the second Advent Sunday A

Opening prayer: Opening Prayer: In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen Lord Jesus, we thank You with profound gratitude for uniting Yourself with our fallen humanity. When You first entered into this world, you remained hidden for nine months in the immaculate womb of Your Blessed Mother. She carried You, body and blood, soul and divinity, within the sanctuary of her body. Precious Lord, as we embrace this Advent Season, please open our eyes to see the great value and blessing of Your Incarnation. Help us to discover Your hidden presence in this world and within our own soul. We choose You, this Advent, as our King and God. Draw us close to You and free us from our sin so that we may love You with a pure and holy heart. Come, Lord Jesus. Amen.

First Reading: A reading from the book of Prophet Isaiah 11:1-11 On that day, a shoot shall sprout from the stump of Jesse, and from his roots a bud shall blossom. The spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him: a spirit of wisdom and of understanding, a spirit of counsel and of strength, a spirit of knowledge and of fear of the LORD, and his delight shall be the fear of the LORD. Not by appearance shall he judge, nor by hearsay shall he decide, but he shall judge the poor with justice, and decide aright for the land's afflicted. He shall strike the ruthless with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall slay the wicked. Justice shall be the band around his waist, and faithfulness a belt upon his hips. Then the wolf shall be a guest of the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; the calf and the young lion shall browse together, with a little child to guide them. The cow and the bear shall be neighbors, together their young shall rest; the lion shall eat hay like the ox. The baby shall play by the cobra's den, and the child lay his hand on the adder's lair. There shall be no harm or ruin on all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be filled with knowledge of the LORD, as water covers the sea. On that day, the root of Jesse, set up as a signal for the nations, the Gentiles shall seek out, for his dwelling shall be glorious. (The word of the Lord / Thanks be to God)

Commentary: The First Reading, taken from the Book of the Prophet Isaiah, is a Messianic prophesy. Isaiah prophecies how God will raise up a Messianic King in the person of Jesus. *"Behold a virgin will conceive and bear a son and shall call him, Emmanuel, for God is with us."* Through this oracle of Isaiah, God promises that He will raise up a new king from the stump of Jesse, the father of King David. According to Isaiah's prophecy this future Messianic King will rule forever because the Spirit of God will rest upon him and remain with him (Is 11:2), and that he will be equipped with the sevenfold gifts of the Spirit of God—wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety, and fear of the Lord (Is 11:2). Isaiah foresees that this king will establish the kingdom of God, not by force of human will and military power, but by offering his life as the atoning sacrifice for the sin of the world. The reading also portrays the golden age of the Messianic Kingdom promising the perfect harmony of Paradise. The Spirit will enable men to create a world in which *"the wolf shall be the guest of the lamb, and a leopard shall lie down with the young goat."*

Responsorial Psalm 72 Justice shall flourish in his time, and fullness of peace for ever.

O God, with your judgment endow the king,
and with your justice, the king's son;
he shall govern your people with justice
and your afflicted ones with judgment.

R. Justice shall flourish in his time, and fullness of peace for ever.

Justice shall flower in his days,
and profound peace, till the moon be no more.
May he rule from sea to sea,
and from the River to the ends of the earth.

R. Justice shall flourish in his time, and fullness of peace for ever.

For he shall rescue the poor when he cries out,
and the afflicted when he has no one to help him.
He shall have pity for the lowly and the poor;
the lives of the poor he shall save.

R. Justice shall flourish in his time, and fullness of peace for ever.

May his name be blessed forever;
as long as the sun his name shall remain.
In him shall all the tribes of the earth be blessed;
all the nations shall proclaim his happiness.

R. Justice shall flourish in his time, and fullness of peace for ever.

Second Reading: A reading from the book of Romans 15:4-9 Brothers and sisters: Whatever was written previously was written for our instruction, that by endurance and by the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to think in harmony with one another, in keeping with Christ Jesus, that with one accord you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Welcome one another, then, as Christ welcomed you, for the glory of God. For I say that Christ became a minister of the circumcised to show God's truthfulness, to confirm the promises to the patriarchs, but so that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written: Therefore, I will praise you among the Gentiles and sing praises to your name. Alleluia (The word of the Lord/Thanks be to God)

Commentary: St. Paul reminds the newly converted Roman Christians, many of whom are Jews, that the Sacred Scriptures of the Old Testament are still a source of instruction, encouragement, and hope. He further advises the Judeo-Christians and Gentile Christians of Rome to “live in harmony with one another according to the Spirit of Christ Jesus,” by being less judgmental and more understanding and benevolent. Paul also reminds the Romans that Jesus came to fulfill God’s promise to the Jews and to extend mercy to the Gentiles. Hence, he encourages the Roman Christians to “accept one another” as Jesus Christ has accepted them.

Gospel: A reading from the holy gospel according to Matthew 3:1-12 John the Baptist appeared, preaching in the desert of Judea and saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!" It was of him that the prophet Isaiah had spoken when he said: A voice of one crying out in the desert, Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths. John wore clothing made of camel's hair and had a leather belt around his waist. His food was locusts and wild honey. At that time Jerusalem, all Judea, and the whole region around the Jordan were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the Jordan River as they acknowledged their sins. When he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Produce good fruit as evidence of your repentance. And do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I tell you, God can raise up children to Abraham from these stones. Even now the ax lies at the root of the trees. Therefore every tree that does not bear good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire. I am baptizing you with water, for repentance, but the one who is coming after me is mightier than I. I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fan is in his hand. He will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into his barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire." (The gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ/ Praise to you Lord Jesus Christ)

Meditation: The second and third Advent Sunday always center on John the Baptist. What is remarkable about John the Baptist? All the four gospels speak about John the Baptist. Like the birth of Jesus was foretold by the prophets of the OT, John's role as the messenger of Jesus was already foretold in the OT prophets Isaiah 40:2 "*I am sending my messenger ahead of you*" Malachi 4:5-6 "*See, I will send the prophet Elijah to you before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes. He will turn the hearts of the parents to their children, and the hearts of the children to their parents; or else I will come and strike the land with total destruction*" What was foretold by the prophets fulfilled when the angel said to Zachariah, the father of John the Baptist, Lk 1:12-16 "*Do not be afraid, Zechariah, because your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall name him John. And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He will drink neither wine nor strong drink. He will be filled with the Holy Spirit even from his mother's womb and he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. He will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah to turn the hearts of fathers toward children and the disobedient to the understanding of the righteous, to prepare a people fit for the Lord*". Jesus says in Luke 7:28 "*I say to you, among those born of women there is no one greater than John*". In our catholic liturgical calendar, we celebrate birthdays only for three persons: Lord Jesus (Dec 25), Blessed Virgin Mary (Sept 8) and John the Baptist (June 24). Because of John's unique role in the history of salvation, the church joyfully celebrates his birthday since the fourth century.

John was a Messenger: John, as we heard in the gospel today was a prophet in the wilderness. He was entrusted with two important assignments. First, he must be a messenger; second, he must prepare the people to accept Jesus as the Messiah. John, in the minds and hearts of his people, was God sent. They accepted him as the authentic voice of God. He pulled the people of his time towards the Messiah and he had a great impact on his people through his witnessing lifestyle.

His first witness is the choice of the location for his preaching. He decided to preach in the wilderness. He gave up the comforts of the city, he decided against the lifestyle of the city dwellers and he made a definite choice to find God in the desert. The desert as we understand is a lonely and desolate place. John wanted to spend quiet moments to find God and to listen to the voice of God. The desert provided him a wonderful opportunity to have a profound God experience. **His second witness is the choice of dress.** He was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist. His dress reminded his people of the ancient prophets who consciously decided to give up the comfort and luxuries of life. John had a simple lifestyle. **His third witness is the choice of food.** John ate locust and wild honey. His diet was simple. He ate the food which the poorest of the poor would eat. John's desert dwelling, his simple and humble lifestyle and his effective preaching appealed to the hearts of his people. Although he had many admirers and followers, he was not carried away by his growing popularity. On the other hand his dream was to prepare his people to accept the Messiah and his entire focus was on Jesus.

John was a Message: John proclaimed the baptism of repentance. His baptism was not a proselyte baptism (converting gentiles into Jews. Instead), it was a baptism for the forgiveness of sins by repentance, inviting people to purity. Quoting the prophet Isaiah, John the Baptist declared, "Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low and the crooked shall be made straight and the rough ways made smooth" (Lk 3:5). As the prophet was calling the people of Israel to prepare for the Lord's visitation, John the Baptist was preparing the people for receiving the messiah. John wasn't there by chance but by a right and definite choice because God had called John to be the messenger who went ahead of Jesus. His insistence was a preparation of heart and life. "The king is coming. Mend your lives and not your roads". All those who came to the Jordan confessed their sins, they were baptized and they experienced God's forgiveness. Therefore, the Jordan experience was a healing experience for the people.

How to apply the message of today's liturgy in our life? 1. Like John, our personal life must be a witness by the marks of simplicity, humility and poverty in spirit. We should get rid of the cultures of consumerism, gluttony and extravagant lifestyle. As we prepare ourselves for this great event of celebrating the birth of Jesus, how does the Word of God challenge us? How can we as a community accept Jesus as the Messiah and proclaim the Messiah to the world? How to prepare ourselves and others who are in our care for the joyful nativity of Jesus?

Concluding prayer: Gracious God, you fill us with joyful expectation of our Divine Savior. You raised up John the baptizer as a herald who calls us to conversion. As we joyfully await the glorious coming of Christ, we entrust ourselves to you. Through the darkness, we look for your wisdom. At this concerned time of pandemic, we come to you in humility. Help us to be awake and aware of the radiance you bring to our life. Help us to be grateful each day for the blessings of family and friends. Like Prophet Isaiah, let us bring hope to people. Like St. Peter, let us warn those who live in error. Like St. John the Baptist, let us be messengers and message as well to one another. (Hail Mary/ Blessing)