

Scripture Study

Second Sunday of Advent – Cycle B



Opening prayer

Isaiah 40:1-5,9-11

(Ps 85:9-14)

2 Peter 3:8-14

Mark 1:1-8

Overview of the Gospel:

- This Sunday's reading is from the opening of St. Mark's Gospel. The shortest of the four Gospels, Mark is marked by a sense of immediacy, which goes well with the themes of vigilance and preparation, which characterize the season of Advent. Mark does not relate any genealogies or infancy narratives, but as his gospel opens we are immediately shown the events leading up to the beginning of Jesus' preaching ministry (Mark 1:14).
- We are also introduced to John the Baptist, Jesus' cousin and precursor, who is preaching "a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins," that is, people were seeking forgiveness of their sins by their repentance. John's baptism did not have the sacramental power to wash away sins like Christian baptism does as it lacked the power of the Holy Spirit conferred by Jesus after his Resurrection (verse 8; John 3:5, 20:22-23).
- John the Baptist was identified as a kind of Elijah the prophet from the Old Testament (2 Kings 1:8), returned to usher in the Messianic age (verses 2-3; Malachi 3:23-24; Mark 9:11-13; Matthew 17:10-12; Luke 1:17). He will also figure prominently in next week's Gospel reading and several of the daily Mass readings throughout Advent.

Questions:

- In the 1st Reading, what is coming to an end for God's people? How are they to prepare for what's coming? What will it look like when it finally arrives?
- In the 2nd Reading, what attitude does St. Peter advise us to have while awaiting the return of Jesus? With what does he say we should occupy ourselves during this time?
- What does Mark (and the Church) mean by "the gospel [good news] of Jesus Christ" (verse 1)? How would you explain the basic message to someone who asked?
- What do the contexts of the quotes in verses 2-3 (Malachi 3:1; Isaiah 40:3; Exodus 23:20) teach about the "coming one"?
- Why is John the Baptist's message so popular with the crowds (verses 4-5)? What does the Church teach about John (CCC 717—720)?
- Given John's message (verses 7-8) what type of person are the crowds anticipating (see Isaiah 32:15-20)?
- What from your life illustrates what it means to "repent"? What can you do (or not do) to prepare for the Lord's coming and to make this a more fruitful Advent?
- John the Baptist prepared "the way of the Lord" (Matthew 3:3; Isaiah 40:3). Who prepared the way of the Lord in your life?

Catechism of the Catholic Church: §§ 151, 422, 523, 575, 696, 717-720, 2447

Closing prayer

Neither repentance avails without grace, nor grace without repentance; for repentance must first condemn sin, that grace may blot it out. So then John, who was a type of the law, came baptizing for repentance, while Christ came to offer grace. –St. Ambrose of Milan (ca. AD 380)

Remember to read and meditate on the daily Mass readings!

"Prepare the way of the Lord!"

Scripture: *Mark 1:1-8*

The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. As it is written in Isaiah the prophet, "Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, who shall prepare thy way; the voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight --" John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And there went out to him all the country of Judea, and all the people of Jerusalem; and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. Now John was clothed with camel's hair, and had a leather girdle around his waist, and ate locusts and wild honey. And he preached, saying, "After me comes he who is mightier than I, the thong of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

OT Reading: *Isaiah 40:1-5,9-11*

"Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned, that she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins. A voice cries: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God." (Isaiah 40:1-3)

Meditation: John the Baptist's life was fueled by one burning passion—to point others to Jesus Christ and to the coming of his kingdom. Who is John the Baptist and what is the significance of his message for our lives? Scripture tells us that John was *filled with the Holy Spirit even from his*



mother's womb (Luke 1:15, 41) by Christ himself, whom Mary had just conceived by the Holy Spirit. When Mary visited her cousin Elizabeth John leapt in her womb as they were filled with the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:41). The fire of the Spirit dwelt in John and made him the forerunner of the coming Messiah. The Spirit led John into the wilderness prior to his ministry where he was tested and grew in the word of God. John's clothing was reminiscent of the prophet Elijah (see Kings 1:8). John broke the prophetic silence of the previous centuries when he began to speak the word of God to the people of Israel. His message was similar to the message of the Old Testament prophets who chided the people of God for their unfaithfulness and who tried to awaken true repentance in them. Among a people unconcerned with the things of God, it was his work to awaken their interest, unsettle them from their complacency, and arouse in them enough good will to recognize and receive Christ when he came. Are you eager to hear God's word and to be changed by it through the power of the Holy Spirit?

John the Baptist was *more than a prophet* (Luke 7:26). John was the *voice of the Consoler* who is coming (John 1:23; Isaiah 40:1-3). He completed the cycle of prophets begun by Elijah (Matt. 11:13-14). What the prophets had carefully searched for and angels longed to see, now came to completion as John made the way ready for the coming of the Messiah, God's Anointed Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. With John the Baptist, the Holy Spirit begins the restoration to the human race of the "divine likeness", prefiguring what would be achieved with and in the Lord Jesus. John's baptism was for repentance -- turning away from sin and taking on a new way of life according to God's word. Our baptism in Jesus Christ by water and the Spirit results in a new birth and entry into God's kingdom as his beloved sons and daughters (John 3:5). Jesus is ready to give us the fire of his Spirit that we may radiate the joy and truth of the gospel to a world in desperate need of God's light and truth. His word has power to change and transform our lives that we may be lights pointing others to Christ. Like John the Baptist, we too are called to give testimony to the light and truth of Jesus Christ. Do you point others to Christ in the way you live, work, and speak?

"Lord, let your light burn brightly in my heart that I may know the joy and freedom of your kingdom. Fill me with your Holy Spirit and empower me to witness the truth of your gospel and to point others to Jesus Christ."

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