

Sunday 6 December 2020

Second Sunday of Advent



'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight'

Introduction

Advent is the Season of expectation and preparation, of watching and waiting. On the Second Sunday of Advent, we focus on the Prophets. We reflect on those who foretold of the birth of the Messiah: prophets of the Old Testament such as Isaiah, and John the Baptist who cried out in the wilderness and proclaimed Jesus as Saviour.

First Reading: Isaiah 40.1-11

With words of incredible power, the prophet of Israel's exile in Babylon proclaims the good news God's people have been waiting so long to hear. Deliverance is at hand; the shepherd will lead the flock homeward.

Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that she has served her term, that her penalty is paid, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins.

A voice cries out: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken." A voice says, "Cry out!" And I said, "What shall I cry?" All people are grass, their constancy is like the flower of the field. The grass withers, the flower fades, when the breath of the Lord blows upon it; surely the people are grass. The grass withers, the flower fades; but the word of our God will stand forever. Get you up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good tidings; lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good tidings, lift it up, do not fear; say to the cities of Judah, "Here is your God!" See, the Lord God comes with might, and his arm rules for him; his reward is with him, and his recompense before him. He will feed his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms, and carry them in his bosom, and gently lead the mother sheep.

Gospel: Mark 1.1-8

Mark's Gospel begins with John the Baptist and quotations from the prophet Isaiah referring to Israel's return from exile in Babylon. The early church searched the OT for every possible prophecy about the coming of the Messiah. Now that God's purpose for Israel was being fulfilled, John calls upon everyone to repent.

The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

*As it is written in the prophet Isaiah,
'See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you,
who will prepare your way;
the voice of one crying out in the wilderness:
'Prepare the way of the Lord,
make his paths straight,'*

John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. He proclaimed, "The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

Reflection

The message from St Mark's Gospel tells us that we are indeed concerned with liberation. But as in the first deliverance from Egypt under Moses, the second Exodus from Babylon, and in the definitive deliverance brought about by Jesus, the work of liberation means going through the wilderness: that is the way in which we can be certain that God goes with us. Our work of liberation is not, however, a smooth, triumphal course. Given the condition of the world and the state of humanity, we shall in fact have constantly to keep going through the wilderness if we are to bring about some form of liberation for others and to taste something of the savour of liberation for ourselves.

(After Edward Schillebeeckx, 1914-2009, Dominican and Theologian).

Prayer

O Lord,
raise up, we pray, your power
and come among us,
and with great might succour us;
that whereas, through our sins and wickedness
we are grievously hindered
in running the race that is set before us,
your bountiful grace and mercy
may speedily help and deliver us;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
to whom with you and the Holy Spirit,
be honour and glory, now and for ever. **Amen**