

Second Sunday of Advent – B
Fr. Chad S. Green
Holy Family Catholic Church
Kirkland, Washington
10 December 2017

Isaiah 40:1-5, 9-11
Psalm 85
2 Peter 3:8-14
(Luke 3:4, 6) Mark 1:1-8

Prepare the Way of the Lord! Live a Life of Repentance

Before beginning a journey in the Ancient East, a traveler was well advised “to pay all debts, provide for dependents...and bid farewell to all.”ⁱ Basically, to have all personal business in order, because there was no guarantee of a safe return. Most people traveled by foot and were vulnerable to the threat of robbers and wild animals, as well as the rough landscape and the poor conditions of the roads. The roads in ancient times were really unpaved tracks; no more than paths beaten down from constant use.ⁱⁱ

In the region surrounding Ancient Israel, however, there were a few paved roads, which were known as “The King’s Highways.” These were built by the king to make his travel throughout his kingdom smoother and safer. When he was planning to come to an area, the king would send a messenger ahead to notify the people of that place. This way, the people had the opportunity to make preparations for his visit, which included making repairs to these roads so that they would be ready for the king to make a safe and smooth arrival to their town.ⁱⁱⁱ

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So it’s fitting that Jesus Christ – the King of kings^{iv} – would also have a messenger sent ahead to tell all the people – to tell all of us – that He is coming.^v From the moment his birth was announced by the angel of the Lord, John the Baptist fulfilled that role as messenger for Jesus.^{vi} He leaped for joy in the womb when he heard Mary greet his mother, Elizabeth.^{vii} And at his birth, his father, Zechariah, declared that he was destined to prepare the way for Jesus.^{viii} Today, on this Second Sunday of Advent – just a couple weeks from celebrating Jesus’ birth into our

world at Christmas – John the Baptist still cries out to us, echoing the words of our First Reading from the Prophet Isaiah:

“Prepare the way of the Lord,
make straight his paths.”^{ix}

These words still echo for us today because we are always in need of conversion; we are always in need of welcoming Jesus Christ more and more into our hearts.^x My friends, the Good News for all people is that Jesus Christ, our Savior and our King, is on His way!^{xi} He’s not coming to us on a paved highway. Rather, He’s on His way, coming into each of our hearts and the hearts of people everywhere!

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So, what can we do to prepare our hearts to welcome Jesus, our Savior and King? In today’s Gospel, John the Baptist tells us the way to prepare our hearts to welcome Jesus: repentance and forgiveness of sins.^{xii}

When we hear those words – repentance and forgiveness of sins – we might already be thinking about the Sacrament of Reconciliation. This is a good place to start! Because when we make a confession, it clears away the things that block the pathway to our hearts: our sins; our guilt and shame; our wounds; our bad habits; our resentments. The Sacrament of Reconciliation makes a straight path for Jesus to come into our hearts and give us freedom, healing, and strength to resist sin and evil. Jesus is always coming to us, offering His love, mercy, and forgiveness in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Our part is to respond to His offer by coming to receive it.

Here at Holy Family, we offer this sacrament Monday through Saturday. Additionally, we will have seven priests here this Wednesday evening, December 13th, at 7:00 p.m. for our Advent Penance Service. My friends, whether we’ve been away from Confession for decades, are regular participants, or are somewhere in between – we all have the same opportunity this

Advent. The same opportunity to prepare the way for Jesus into our hearts; to welcome Jesus into our hearts as our Savior and our King!

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The Sacrament of Reconciliation is a good place to start, but it is only the beginning of repentance. It's the beginning because it gives us strength to move forward and live a life of repentance. Repentance certainly includes feeling remorse and asking forgiveness, but the deeper meaning of repentance^{xiii} is changing one's "heart and mind about what is important in life, and then [changing] your life accordingly."^{xiv}

A life of repentance takes some effort on our part. It takes effort to prepare the way of the Lord and welcome Him into our hearts. This is what Advent is about: taking that time to discern what is important in life and making choices that welcome Jesus' love in our hearts.

My dear brothers and sisters, Jesus is always on His way, coming to meet us. This Holy Season of Advent is the time for us to make straight His paths. It's time to take quiet moments to discern what is most important, and to make plans and decisions to act on it. It's time to welcome Jesus into our hearts in a new and deeper way!

ⁱ William Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew: Volume 1 (Chapters 1-10), Revised Edition* (1975), 45

ⁱⁱ See Isaiah 40:3: Hebrew word for "way" = *derek* (דֶּרֶךְ)

derek (*Strong's Hebrew Concordance* 1870: way, road; *NAS Exhaustive Concordance*: from *darak*)

darak (*Strong's Hebrew Concordance* 1869: to tread, march; *NAS Exhaustive Concordance*: a prim. root)

From Bible History Online "Roads in Ancient Israel": "...the Hebrew word for road means a beaten worn out path."

See Mark 1:3: Greek word for "way" = *tribos* (τρίβος)

tribos (*Strong's Greek Concordance* 5147: a beaten track, a path; HELPS Word-studies: *tribos* (from *tribō*, "to rub") – properly, a rut (path) formed by rubbing (constant use))

ⁱⁱⁱ Barclay, 45

^{iv} See Mark 11:9-10; 15:2, 12, 18, 26; also see 1 Timothy 6:15; Revelation 1:5, 17:14, 19:16

^v Mark 1:2; also see Malachi 3:1

^{vi} Luke 1:11-17

^{vii} Luke 1:41, 44

^{viii} Luke 1:76

^{ix} Isaiah 40:3; Mark 1:3 (also see Matthew 3:3; Luke 3:4)

^x Adrien Nocent, OSB, "6. Second Week of Advent: Prepare the Way" in *The Liturgical Year, Volume One: Advent, Christmas, Epiphany*, tr. by Matthew J. O'Connell (2013), 99: "The voice crying in the desert will echo until the end of time, since conversion will always be necessary, and the work of conversion will never be finished."

^{xi} Luke 2:10

^{xii} Mark 1:4

^{xiii} See Mark 1:5: Greek word for “repentance” = *metanoia* (μετάνοια)
metanoia (*Strong’s Greek Concordance* 3341: change of mind, repentance, change in the inner man)

^{xiv} John P. Meier, *Matthew: New Testament Message, Volume 3* (1990), 23