

## II Sunday of Advent, 2024

As we enter the Second Sunday of Advent, we are reminded that this season is not just about preparing for the birth of Jesus on Christmas Day, but also about preparing for His daily coming into our lives and His final coming at the end of time. The scriptures today invite us to reflect on what it means to "prepare a royal highway in our hearts" to welcome Jesus, our Savior, and to be ready for His second coming as our Judge.

In the first reading, the prophet Baruch speaks of the return of the exiles to Jerusalem, a moment of great joy after their time of suffering. He calls the people to rejoice, for their salvation is near. Baruch's words, although directed to the exiles, also have a deeper meaning for us today. Just as the people of Israel were called to return to their homeland, we are called to return to God, to reconcile with Him, especially during this Advent season. We are called to leave behind the slavery of sin and return to our loving Father.

The Responsorial Psalm reminds us of the joy of the exiles returning to Jerusalem, who had once wept but now rejoiced. It is a powerful image of the transformation that happens when we open our hearts to God's grace. The same joy can fill our hearts when we prepare for the coming of Christ - not just on Christmas, but every day.

In the second reading, St. Paul offers guidance to the Philippians, encouraging them to live in love and purity as they await the second coming of Christ. He urges them to be "pure and blameless" before God, reminding us that Advent is also a time to evaluate our lives and make sure we are living according to God's will, not just waiting for an event, but actively preparing our hearts.

The Gospel brings us to the voice of John the Baptist, the one crying out in the wilderness: "Prepare the way of the Lord, make His paths straight." John's message is clear: we need to clear away the obstacles in our lives that prevent us from receiving Jesus fully. He calls us to level the mountains of pride, fill the valleys of selfishness and sin, and straighten the crooked paths of bad habits, unhealthy relationships, and dishonesty. This Advent, John challenges each one of us to examine our hearts and ask: What mountains need to be humbled? What valleys of sin need to be filled? Where are the crooked paths in my life that need to be made straight?

Brothers and sisters, this preparation isn't just for Christmas. It is for the daily coming of Christ in our lives - in the Holy Eucharist, in the Word of God, in the people we meet every day, and in the praying community. Christ comes to us in these ways, and we must be ready to receive Him. This means taking time to pray, to reflect on our actions, and to seek reconciliation, especially with those we may have hurt or with whom we are angry. It also means forgiving those who have hurt us, as Jesus teaches in the Gospel: "If you forgive others their transgressions, your Heavenly Father will also forgive you."

Advent invites us to repent - to confront our sins, seek forgiveness from God, and make amends where we have wronged others. We must be willing to humble ourselves, to reconcile, and to let go of grudges and resentment. We are called to live with the joy of knowing that we are forgiven and to extend that forgiveness to others. It is in doing this that we make a "royal highway" for Jesus to enter into our hearts and lives.

As we journey through Advent, let us take time each day to examine our lives and to clear away what might be blocking Jesus from fully entering our hearts. Let us straighten out the crooked ways of sin, level the mountains of pride, and fill the valleys of neglect. Let us make our hearts ready to receive Him, so that He can be reborn in us this Christmas and dwell with us always.

May God bless you all, and may this Advent be a time of true preparation for the coming of our Lord, both at Christmas and at the end of time.