

Homily Second Sunday Advent-B



Today's readings breath a spirit of hope. Advent is the season of hope. We need hope in this time of short days and long nights.

In the reading from the prophet Isaiah, we hear God speaking: *Console my people, console them*. The inhabitants of Jerusalem had been taken into exile by the king of Babylon where they spent about 70 years. They were far from their own people, from their land, far from the Temple. It was a period of suffering and trial. But now, towards the end of the exile, through the mouth of Isaiah, there is a message of hope: *console my people, console them, their time of exile is coming to an end*. And indeed, not long afterwards, Darius, a new king, allowed them to return to Jerusalem.

The Gospel reading also brings hope. Today's passage is the beginning of Mark's Gospel. Mark starts his Gospel writing: *the beginning of the Good News about Jesus Christ*. What is this Good News? Jesus is Good News. His message is Good News. In the midst of so much bad news,

Mark brings us Good News, that God will never abandon us, but comes close to us in Jesus his Son.

Also in the world around us, though we are still in the midst of the pandemic and the days are dark, there are flickers of hope. The news about the different vaccines is surely a message of hope, a message which puts before us the prospect of a life of greater normality.

Let us return to today's Gospel. Mark is telling us that he will give us Good News about Jesus. Yet, the main character in today's Gospel is John the Baptist. John was a prophet, an austere person who lived in the wilderness. He must have been a good preacher. People came in their numbers to listen to him. John called the people to a change of heart. And many received baptism as a sign of their willingness to change.

John was preparing the people for the coming of Jesus: He called the people *to prepare a way for the Lord*. Prepare a way for the Lord: what does that mean for me/ for us? What can I do to prepare for the coming of Jesus at Christmas, when we will celebrate his birth?

In these weeks before Christmas we all run the risk of being overly concerned with the material preparation for Christmas: the sending of Christmas cards, buying of presents, and thinking about the ingredients for Christmas dinner.

All this is important. But I think when John is calling us to *prepare a way for the Lord* he is thinking about something more. Maybe, we need some time every day to sit down, switch off our phones, and reflect in silence: what is the change of heart God is calling me to? How can I prepare a way for the Lord?

John preached in the wilderness, in the desert. And the people followed him into the desert. In the Bible the desert or the wilderness is a symbolic place, it is the place to discover God, the place where there are less distractions than in ordinary life and therefore the place where people come to understand what is truly important in life.

I think we too, have gone through the desert. The two lock downs no doubt, have been wilderness experiences. Painful times, times of isolation and separation from our friends and family members. But

maybe they also have been a time of less distractions, a time to encounter God and to understand what is truly important in life.

Many people might say: what we have discovered is that we need each other. What gives meaning to life are relationships, loving relationships with each other and with God.

John the Baptist is calling us: *Prepare a way for the Lord*. Let us put into practice what we have learned in the wilderness of the lock down. Then, we will be preparing a way for the Lord!