

2ND SUNDAY OF ADVENT, C  
ADVENT, THE NEW EXODUS

*“A voice cries in the wilderness: ‘Prepare a way for the Lord, make his paths straight. Every valley will be filled in, every mountain and hill be laid low, winding ways will be straightened and rough roads made smooth” (Lk. 3: 4, 5)*

***The Need to Prepare:***

Then cleanse every breast from sin.  
Make straight the way for God within,  
Prepare we in our hearts a home  
where such a mighty Guest may come.

This verse from the classic song “On Jordan’s Banks” composed by Charles Coffin (1676 – 1749) reflects the theme and the call of the Readings of this Second Sunday of Advent. Today, the Church turns our attention away from Christ’s Second Coming to His first coming and invites us to “prepare a way” for Him. The mode of every preparation is determined by who and for what we are preparing. It would be inappropriate and wasteful for an athlete preparing for a hundred metres dash in the Olympics to spend all her time in the boxing ring. Similarly, a city preparing to welcome the president of the country, would not receive commendation from her guests if she spends her resources and time refurbishing and decorating the Churches. As Christians, we need to know who and what we are preparing for to be able to direct our time, energy, and resources very fittingly. Let us hear what the Readings teach us about these.

***The New Exodus:*** In the First Reading (Bar. 5: 1-9), prophet Baruch brings forth the theme of the “new exodus”, which the prophets spoke about (Is. 10: 10-16; Jer. 23: 7-8; Ezek. 37: 21-22). The Israelites were in bondage in Egypt for 430 years. At the appointed time, God, through Moses, led them out to the land He promised their fathers. This was the first exodus. The settlement in the land “flowing with milk and honey” was unfortunately not flowing with peace and harmony as the people, time after time, disobeyed God. As punishment for their stiff-neckedness, God surrendered them into the hands of the Assyria and Babylon. They dispersed into the ends of the earth and four corners of the world. The prophets foretold the future time when God would repeat the exodus – the new exodus – to bring back His people to the land He gave to their fathers. It is this pericope from Baruch that we read today. In this new exodus, the return is not from Egypt and not through the wilderness but from the nations of the earth to which they had scattered. The message is nuanced with joyful images: Jerusalem, take off your dress of sorrow and distress, put on the beauty of the glory of God forever, wrap the cloak of the integrity of God around joy, put the diadem of the glory of the Eternal on your head ... for God will guide Israel in joy by the light of His glory with His mercy and integrity as an escort.” This is what Advent is about, a preparation for “New Exodus,” this new exodus is neither the first nor the first new, so permit me to call it “The Second New Exodus.” Unlike the first and the second exodus, in which the people travelled from one place to the holy land, this exodus is not a movement from one geographical location to another, it is a journey of the heart, which

requires spiritual preparations. For, as in the second exodus, we too have sinned and have fallen short of the grace of God. The deliverance here is not from any human oppressor but from sin which causes a rift between us and God. Our new Moses is Christ, Who comes to take us on this glorious journey, to which St. Paul refers in the Second Reading.

**Joyful Hope:** It is only apt that we should read from St. Paul's Letter to the Philippians, the "Epistle of Joy" during this season of joyful hope. The "joy" or "rejoice" (χαίρω) occurs twelve times in this short epistle, the most familiar of which is (4: 4) "Rejoice in the Lord always, again, I say, rejoice." The words of St. Paul, within the context of Advent, are words of encouragement and exhortation for us to faithfully prepare for the "Day of Christ" through prayers, acts of love and living blameless lives. This lifestyle opens us to "the One Who began this good work in you" so that when He comes at Christmas, He may find not watchfully waiting.

**What Must We Do?** The historical references in this Gospel (Lk. 3: 1-6) poses the question: Why does Luke go into such historical details? Pope Emeritus, Benedict XVI answers thus: "The Evangelist evidently wanted to warn those who read or hear about it that the gospel is not a legend, but the account of a true story, that Jesus of Nazareth is a historical figure who fits into that precise context." We must accept the fact that Jesus was born in time, into a human family, with relations and friends, and lived in geographical space. This same Jesus is the Eternal Word made flesh, whose Coming we await. About what we must do at this time of Advent to be ready, the "Voice" cries out that we should:

1. **"Prepare a way for the Lord":** The way is not the physical construction of roads for the Lord, rather it refers to a spiritual cleansing, repentance, a metanoia, a change of the heart. The heart is the door through which the Lord enters. "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my call and opens, I will come in and eat with him and he with me" (Rev. 3: 20).
2. **"Every valley will be filled in":** This refers to the hope and encouragement that is offered to the poor, the lowly, the neglected, those are at the ebb, forgotten and unloved by the society, who feel unworthy or are made to feel so by the privileged of this world. Filling the valleys could also refer to our giving attention to the sins of omission in our lives. That means, making efforts to do the good things we ought to do as a way of being ready for the Lord.
3. **"Every mountain and hill be made low":** This refers to the humbling of the proud and the repentance the arrogant must undergo if they want to receive the Lord when He comes. This could also refer to repentance of our sins of commission. A time to refrain from those sins we commit with the faintest prick of emotions.
4. **"Every winding way will be straightened, and rough roads made smooth":** The twists and turns of the human heart contorted by sins are the winding and rough roads that must be straightened. The human heart must be stripped of its self-exaltation and made to embrace the humility of the King born in the stable laid in a manger. These could also refer to the need for us to eschew all forms of lifestyle that are contrary to the principles of the gospel. In that way, smoothening and straightening our lives through simple and honest living.

***My dear friends***, the joyful anticipation of Christ among His people, like every other great expectation, demand that we prepare, so that “That Day” may not be “sprung upon us like a thief” (Lk. 21: 34); so that when He comes, He may find in our hearts a home to dwell. In the words of the composer: “Prepare we in our hearts a home where such a mighty Guest may come.” Let us embrace the sacrament of reconciliation where we encounter God’s loving mercy. He waits to welcome us to speak the truth in its simplest and purest forms with humility and contrition.