

Prepare the Way of the Lord

Second Sunday of Advent (C) Bar 5:1-9/Phil 1:4-6, 8-11/Lk 3:4, 6
Ave Maria Catholic Church. December 8, 2023. Fr. David M Vidal

With the rite of Christian initiation, we welcomed the Catechumens who will be baptized at the Easter Vigil and the Candidates who will be received in full communion with the Catholic Church. The parish community welcomes you, and we offer our support in prayers!

In God's providence, this special moment in your lives happens on the Second Sunday of Advent. The liturgy of this Sunday brings new light to your Christian initiation.

In the first reading, the prophet Baruch reminds us that *"every lofty mountain [must] be made low, and that the age-old depths and gorges be filled to level ground"* (Bar 5:7). Then, St. John the Baptist reiterates the message: *"Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths. Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low,"* (Lk 3:4-5).

All of us must undergo a period of preparation. Jesus, the Emmanuel, God with us, is coming to us, and we must prepare His way.

God's request for humanity's readiness has been repeated throughout history. God has sent his messengers, one after another, and again and again, He has appealed to us. Perhaps, one day, we will listen; perhaps, one day, we will understand; perhaps, one day, we will accept the spiritual renewal that He wants to bring us.

The prophets declare: "Prepare the Way of the Lord." What does it mean?

First, "To prepare the way of the Lord" means awareness.

We must admit that we are not God but God's children. God created us. We must also admit that we are not perfect: We have physical and spiritual limits. Finally, we need to admit that we fall short of the moral mark. And this is difficult to recognize. Why? Because as St. Augustine teaches in his book of Confessions, we tend "to place ourselves behind our back so that we don't see ourselves." It is easy to identify the shortcomings of others but not our own.

However, nobody can correct the path if he is not aware that his path is crooked. Awareness of our sinful ways is essential for our spiritual progress and renewal.

For this awareness, memory is fundamental. We must remember who we are, what we have done, where we stand, and all of this must be done with a simple vision. Simplicity is the opposite of duplicity or crookedness. We need to see things as they are, not as we wish to

see them. We need to have an honest reading of ourselves without hiding the failures and without denying the victories. Without this truthful knowledge of ourselves, we will never be free. Truth is at the heart of freedom. There is no freedom without truth.

Second, “To prepare the way of the Lord,” we not only need a truthful mind, but we also need a good heart.

Awareness is not sufficient. We can clearly know what we must change, but that does not make us good people! To prepare the way of the Lord, we must not only know what is good, true, beautiful, and worthy of praise. We must embrace it, and we embrace it with our hearts when we love goodness.

That is an exercise of the heart! We must pray for a humble and contrite heart (Psalm 51) ready to accept goodness. This is not an easy task. Why? Because sometimes, we mistake freedom for licentiousness. We believe that freedom means doing whatever we want and forget that freedom means choosing to do what is good.

Saint Paul speaks about this renewal of the heart when he writes in his letter to the Galatians: *“For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become servants to one another”* (Gal 5,13).

True love is the love of friendship. True love desires goodness in oneself and others. True love does not use others as objects of pleasure or as pawns for power. True love fights with passion for goodness in oneself and others and is ready to suffer for it.

Finally, “To prepare the way of the Lord,” we must be people of action.

Our lives are like balanced scales, and once we acknowledge that in the past, we have done things for which we are not proud, we must then gather with our present actions all the good works we can to counterbalance that evil. Let us remember Saint Paul's teachings to the Romans: *“Do not be conquered by evil but conquer evil with good”* (Rom 12:21).

Saint Paul speaks about “conquering,” and this conquest or achievement cannot be done just with good wishes. Actions are love more than good reasons!

During Advent, the Church invites “to prepare the way of the Lord” through good actions. We are encouraged to pray, sacrifice ourselves, and assist others. There are so many good things we can do. Where should we start?

Let me suggest this: start at home. You don't need to go far away to do good; the one who needs your good example, a comforting word, extended hand, charitable work, and assurance of faith is next to you.

We are called to do many good things where we are and where we live as husbands and wives, sons and daughters, employers and employees, students and teachers. This is a debt of love. We especially owe a debt of love to those closest to us. By doing good things for them, we prepare the way of the Lord.

The Christian initiation must become a way of life. We should always consider ourselves as “beginners.” With enthusiasm, we should look for excellence in life. That enthusiasm will become a reality with the grace of God if we accept truth, love goodness, and are willing to sacrifice ourselves by doing what is good.