

Sunday, December 7, 2014

Second Sunday of Advent

Meditation and Questions for Reflection or Group Discussion

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

Advent, A Time to Prepare the Way for the Coming of the Lord

He will prepare your way. (Mark 1:2)

Clearly, John the Baptist was a mighty man of God. He was an ambassador called to prepare the way of the Lord by pointing the people to Jesus.

How did John fulfill his calling? By his witness and by his words. His witness was that of a detached, ascetic man who dressed in rough clothes and lived in the wilderness. And backing up his witness were his words—words that cut people to the heart and moved them to examine their lives. Because of John’s witness and his words, people from all over Judea came to see him. And once they saw and heard, many repented of their sins and turned back to God (Mark 1:5).

We often think of John the Baptist as a fire-and-brimstone kind of person. And he was to some degree. But fire and brimstone without love and mercy don’t do justice to the message of Christ. John was also humble and compassionate. He was concerned for the people around him, so much so that he attracted disciples who committed themselves to following him and learning from him.

Like John, we all have a part to play in God’s plan. We are called to be Jesus’ messengers and to bear heavenly fruit by the witness of our lives and by the words we speak. So as Christmas draws near, let’s set our hearts on preparing the way for Jesus. As John called the people of his day, let’s repent and go to Confession. Let’s also tell our families that we need to go to Confession and get right with the Lord—not in a threatening or self-righteous way but as loving ambassadors of God who care about our families.

Peter’s letter tells us that Jesus will come again. It says that he will usher in “new heavens and a new earth” (2 Peter 3:13). It will be glorious. Until he comes, let’s try our best to be Christ’s ambassadors, through “holiness and devotion” (3:11).

“Lord, help me to be like John, a living, loving ambassador for your kingdom.”

(Many thanks to *The Word Among Us* (www.wau.org) for allowing us to use meditations from their monthly devotional magazine. Used with permission. *The Word Among Us* Mass Edition contains all the Mass readings and prayers, and a meditation for each of the daily and Sunday Masses.)

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Questions for Reflection or Group Discussion

1. In the beginning of the first reading, we hear these words, “Comfort. Comfort my people, says your God” (Isaiah 40:1). How would you describe the “comfort” God is offering his people? In what ways do these words reflect the Lord’s great love and mercy toward his suffering people, Israel? How was this “comfort,” which was foretold by John the Baptist, fulfilled in Jesus Christ?
2. The responsorial psalm speaks of the close relationship between kindness and truth and between justice and peace saying that “Kindness and truth shall meet” and “justice and peace shall kiss.” Many papal teaching have been focused on charity and justice as the way to “peace.” As we reflect on the coming of Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace, during this Advent Season, what specifically can you do to help restore justice and peace within your family, or among family members -- for example, in any relationships that have gone sour?
3. The second reading exhorts us to live holy lives with these words: “What sort of persons ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God” (2 Peter 3:11-12). Why do you think the author believed that our living holy lives would cause a hastening of the coming of Christ?
4. The Gospel reading speaks of preparing the way of the Lord. What can you do this Advent to help your family, your friends and neighbors, or your co-workers prepare to receive Christ in a deeper way during this grace-filled season?
5. In the Gospel, St. John the Baptist also proclaims the need for repentance and forgiveness of sins. Make a commitment to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation this Advent and Christmas season. What are some ways that you and your family can prepare for it, so that you and they will experience more deeply the Lord’s forgiveness of sins?
6. The meditation reminds us that “Like John, we all have a part to play in God’s plan.” It then goes on to challenge us with these words: “We are called to be Jesus’ messengers and to bear heavenly fruit by the witness of our lives and by the words we speak. So as Christmas draws near, let’s set our hearts on preparing the way for Jesus.” What are some steps you can take to respond to this challenge to prepare the way for the coming of Jesus?
7. Take some time now to pray for the grace to be “Jesus’ messengers” and “ambassadors for Christ” (2 Corinthians 5:20), especially during this Advent Season of grace. Use the prayer at the end of the meditation as the starting point.

[The discussion questions were created by Maurice Blumberg, a member of the NSC Council and a director of partner relations for **The Word Among Us Partners**, (<http://www.waupartners.org/>), a ministry of **The Word Among Us** (www.wau.org) to the Military, Prisoners, and women with crisis pregnancies or who have had abortions. Maurice was also the founding Executive Director of the **National Fellowship of Catholic Men** (<http://www.nfcmusa.org/>), for which he is currently a Trustee. He can be contacted at mblumberg@wau.org or mblumberg@aol.com].