

2nd Sunday Advent Year "B"

December 9-10, 2017

Readings: Isaiah 40: 1-5, 9-11; 2 Peter 3:8-14; Mark 1:1-8

Opening lines are always a challenge, whether written or spoken. If you have ever experienced writer's block, you can relate. I can recall all too vividly having an index card by the telephone, so that when I called a girl to ask her out to a dance, I was fully prepared with a list of topics to discuss should the conversation hit an awkward silence.

We have a unique situation in today's Gospel that contains the opening lines of St. Mark's Gospel. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, he chose to begin his account by quoting someone else, namely Isaiah, the great prophet of Jerusalem who lived some 750 years before him.

*Behold, I am sending my messenger ahead of you;
he will prepare your way.*

A voice of one crying out in the desert:

"Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths."

The call of Isaiah seemed every bit as valid to Mark even after nearly eight centuries. How much more so now, 2000 years later? Would St. Mark be puzzled that we too are speaking of preparing the way of the Lord when he had already come? No, I do not think so because the preparation of which St. Mark spoke is not a task to checked off a box.

Rather, it is a way of life, a daily endeavor to seek to be in God's presence, always watchful and waiting. St. Mark saw the danger in having people confuse the message from the messenger. No matter how much people wanted to make him the main event, his purpose was only to point to another. Just as Isaiah's entire life was bound up with Jerusalem, the city he loved, so too was St. Mark's account of the life of Jesus all-consuming. It was never about himself, but about another. According to tradition, Mark was one of the youngest apostles, and is usually identified with the Mark of Acts 12:12. He first met Paul, then later he met Peter and wrote his Gospel after the martyrdom of both of them, so profoundly did the event affect him. It should not surprise us

that he pulls out the heavy hitters in quoting Isaiah and John the Baptist in the very first chapter. He came out strongly telling his readers to prepare, to get ready, to be on guard.

Have any of you ever saved up coupons or box tops to send in for a gift or prize? I still remember doing this as a child, and then waiting for my gift to arrive...**four to six weeks** for delivery. That is an eternity for an eight-year-old! I'd check the mail every day, and then finally my prized toy arrived. I had earned it, and it was all mine.

The offer stipulated that if I collected so many box tops, I could redeem them for the prize. In retrospect, the waiting only heightened the expectation, something that I believe has been lost in a day and age of overnight deliveries. There is really no discernable reason to wait any longer, especially if you just pay a little extra money.

As our Catechism reminds us:

“When the Church celebrates the liturgy of Advent each year, she makes present the ancient expectancy of the Messiah, for by sharing in the loving preparation for the Savior’s first coming, the faithful renew their ardent desire for his second coming.”¹ Here’s the hard and fast truth. I suspect that you did not gather on Thanksgiving to enjoy microwave turkey. No, that is one meal for which everyone prepares. It typically takes 15 minutes per pound to prepare a good turkey.

It flies in the face of modern society, which is one reason why so few really cook from scratch anymore. Who has time to let dough rise for a couple of hours when you can run down to Breadsmith on Grand Ave?

The birth of the Savior has made all of the difference in the world. He is the reason for my hope, for my joy. He is the reason why I believe my life has hope, for my joy. He is the reason why I believe that my life makes sense, and why I do not despair despite grave challenges to our country and to the faith. Now, more than ever, we need a reason for hope.

¹ Catechism of the Catholic Church, paragraph # 524

And yet the cries of the babe in the manger are threatened with being drown out in the midst of a cacophony of noise in which we surround ourselves. So many are uncomfortable with silence, with waiting. Thus, we schedule ourselves for every minute. Yes, it is good to be productive and efficient. But faith does not happen in an instant- it takes a lifetime, it is a process whereby we cooperate with God's grace. That cannot happen without silence, without waiting.

We are called to make straight and clear the path for God- to clear away sin, selfishness, jealousy, pride, and whatever keeps us from the path of truth- and to set them aside to await the Lord. If we can do this during Advent, I believe we will have the best Christmas of all.