

## **Second Sunday in Advent, Cycle B December 7, 2008**

**Readings: Isaiah 40:1-5, 9-11; 2 Peter 3:8-14, 16-17; Mark 1:1-8**

### **Between Two Comings**

The snow is certainly beautiful this morning. It made the driving a little more difficult, but the landscape along the way was a lot prettier. Yesterday afternoon, I just had to put on my boots and take a walk into down. I shuffled through the snow and enjoyed the Christmas decoration and ended up whistling Christmas carols, especially “It’s Beginning to Look a Lot Like Christmas” and, of course, “Let it Snow, Let it Snow, Let it Snow”.

Advent, is a time of preparation between two comings of the Lord. Of course, we prepare to celebrate Christ’s first coming on Christmas morning. But Advent, especially the beginning of this liturgical season, also calls for us to prepare for His second coming in judgment. And to do this we start by reflecting on our sinfulness. It is a season for penance that ends up being a time of rejoicing. And we rejoice because we know that Jesus came to be one of us; to atone for our sins. It is the wonderful gift we will celebrate in a few short weeks; the true gift of Christmas.

We hear the wonderful promise of God’s mercy in our first reading from the prophet Isaiah. Through Isaiah, God tells the Jewish people that their servitude and exile are about to be completed. God’s chosen people had been in exile in Babylon because the people and their leaders did not follow God’s commandments. The people have paid greatly for their prior sinfulness, but Isaiah now announces that a victorious road will be built for them to allow their return to Jerusalem. A voice cries out in the desert to prepare for their journey home.

The book of the prophet Isaiah is pretty amazing. We refer to the writings of Isaiah during Lent because he so clearly depicts Jesus as the Suffering Servant; he prophesies incredible details about Jesus’ passion and death on the cross. And we use his writings extensively in Advent as well, again because of his clear prophesies. Today we hear Isaiah’s foreshadowing of John the Baptist. John is the last of the prophets and he cries out in the desert for us to prepare a way home for all nations to the heavenly Jerusalem. But the path is to be straight and true. Jesus is the way and the truth. He is not only the way we are to follow; but He is our destination as well. John came to lead the people to Jesus and tells them that they must first make straight their paths.

John baptized in the Jordan. It was not the sacramental baptism that we have now; that had not yet been established by Christ. But it was a significant purification rite; a chance to admit one’s sinfulness, to publicly declare one’s repentance, and to commit to change the course of one’s life. It signified a desire to pursue the straight path.

God has given us grace to lead us to repentance, but we must accept it. God gives us that grace because He doesn’t want any of us to perish. He is patient, but ultimately it is up to us. Through our sacramental baptisms we have the Holy Spirit working within us as a voice crying out for us to straighten our paths. But, will we listen? Do we pay attention to the signs around us? Are we willing to make sacrifices and spend time in prayer so that we are better able to hear the voice speaking within us? Or, are we too busy with the

noise and distractions of the world around us, like I was yesterday with the Christmas decorations? How much patience will God have with us? Will a day be like a thousand years, or will a thousand years be like a day? Stop and listen. Take advantage of this Advent season to examine your life to see where changes are needed. Do not let these days be simply like any other days. Consciously make an effort to spend time in prayer and reflection. Make some effort to step back from the comforts of your daily life. Make some sacrifices and symbolically step out into the desert with John the Baptist. There will be plenty of time later for celebrating as we approach Christmas Day.

Like John the Baptist, be simple and pure and unattached to the things of this world. You will straighten your path to the heavenly Jerusalem and be an example for others. You, too, need to be a voice crying out in the wilderness, and God know our society is definitely a wilderness these days. He needs every one of our voices, for through our baptisms we are called to be His prophets.

**Deacon Joe Hulway**