

Second Sunday of Advent (C)
December 6, 2015.

Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight (Lk. 3:4).

The Gospel of the Mass on this second Sunday of Advent introduces us to John the Baptist, *the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Prepare the way of the Lord; make his paths straight'*. John the Baptist is one of the three Advent figures who during this time of preparation for Christmas guide us towards our encounter with the living God in Christ. John, who calls us to repentance, echoes the sentiments of Isaiah, whose prophecies express the longing of ancient Israel for the Messiah, and humanity's longing for salvation. This longing is fulfilled in our Lady, the Blessed Virgin Mary, the chosen Daughter of Israel, and the Mother of the Messiah.

This is why God became man; that we might be delivered from the slavery of sin and death, the cruelty of paganism, and the slow death of a life without purpose and meaning. Human life, not simply in the different functions that people undertake, but in its very essence, is purposeful. In the words of a prayer composed by Blessed John Henry Newman, *God has created me to do Him some definite service. He has committed some work to me which He has not committed to another. I have my mission. I may never know it in this life, but I shall be told it in the next.* In each one of us God has begun a good work and in heeding the Baptist's call to repentance and vigilance we endeavour to grow in our knowledge of God and in our devotion to Him; that we might become mature in our faith, and that our spiritual life may grow and deepen to become a life of deep devotion. This is the work of a lifetime.

The call to repentance is as much a call to truth as it a call to faith in Christ Jesus, the Saviour. *But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God; who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God (Jn. 1:12-13).* Our faith in the Son of God enables us to be born of God. Of all of us, disciples of Jesus Christ, it can be said *that our true 'genealogy' is faith in Jesus, who gives us a new origin, who brings us to birth 'from God' (Jesus of Nazareth, the Infancy Narratives, p. 13).* At the level of our being, the essence of who we are (our *ontology*), the Mystery of the Incarnation enables us to live in an altogether new manner. Once we come to faith, everything changes because *we* change. As St. Paul declares, *If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold the new has come (2 Cor. 5:17).*

In heeding the call to repentance and faith in Christ Jesus our Saviour, we dispose ourselves to new possibilities; to growth in knowledge and love, in truth and in mercy. To repent is to have an *unconditional readiness to change in order to be transformed in Christ* (Dietrich Von Hildebrand). This is the true and complete meaning of repentance. When we begin to appreciate what this really means we begin also to understand the uniqueness, the beauty and the need for Christianity for the true faith reveals the true God and enables man to live with the clarity that our faith alone provides. Again this week, we pray for the victims of Islamic terrorism and again, I repeat, that at the root of all this violence is an erroneous understanding of the nature of God and by consequence, the nature of the human person. Our hearts are moved to deep compassion in the face of these horrific events. Real compassion however, does not mean concealing the moral truth – no matter the circumstance.

Our culture is gripped by a willful misunderstanding of human nature; one that denies the need for repentance at all. As a result, over time we have lost the ability to appreciate its absolute necessity at both the natural or human level and at the supernatural level. This has resulted in a general climate of doctrinal and moral disorientation even within the Church. Repentance is the first step on the road of discipleship that leads to an altogether different manner of being and living, of thinking and acting. Our humble submission to God in Christ bestows on us a dignity that simply requires of us that we live in the awareness of this dignity. As our understanding of this dignity deepens we come to an ever greater understanding of our need for continuous conversion and for a life of virtue. More than ever, in the face of this doctrinal and moral disorientation, our faithful witness is needed. So we must pray for perseverance; that we might remain in the truth of Christ Our Lord.

Our Lord teaches us by His words and example an altogether new way of living. We must learn from Him to be humble and gentle of heart, in the conviction that He has a specific work for each one of us. We must appropriate His identity as Son of the Father and through the grace of daily repentance deepen our awareness of our dignity as children of God. Blessed John Henry Newman gives voice to this conviction: *He has not created me for naught. I shall do good; I shall do His work. I shall be an angel of peace, a preacher of truth in my own place, while not intending it if I do but keep His commandments. Therefore, I will trust Him, whatever I am; I can never be thrown away. If I am in sickness, my sickness may serve Him, in perplexity, my perplexity may serve Him. If I am in sorrow, my sorrow may serve Him. He does nothing in vain. He knows what He is about. He may take away my friends. He may throw me among strangers. He may make me feel desolate, make my spirits sink, hide my future from me. Still, He knows what He is about.* This radical faith and trust in God's love and purpose for each one of us is the strength of the saints, the consolation of sinners, and the confidence of both.

Everything we do in this life, the good we do, and even the suffering we endure; *everything* is at the service of the work that God has begun in us and given to us. It may be said that through the mysteries of our own earthly life, because of our faith in Christ Jesus, we become more mature and devout; and so the work of salvation continues; and in and through us the offer of salvation is extended to others. In this manner all of us too can *prepare the way of the Lord and make his paths straight.*