

AN ACT OF SPIRITUAL COMMUNION 6th December 2020
Second Sunday of Advent

To prepare ourselves for our worship, we reflect on the day and on our relationships.

- *What good things have come from God today?*
- *Where have I fallen short?*
- *What will I try to do differently in future?*

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen

In today's Gospel, we hear the voice of John the Baptist: 'Prepare a way for the Lord, make his paths straight.' This is a call to repentance.

Repentance involves a determined turning away from sin and a full-hearted turning to God. Let us call to mind our sins, and ask the Lord to help us to overcome them.

Lord Jesus, you search us and you know us, all our ways lie open to you.

Lord have mercy

Lord have mercy

You keep an account of our wanderings and a record of our tears.

Christ have mercy

Christ have mercy

Your keep our feet from stumbling and our hearts from straying.

Lord have mercy

Lord have mercy

May the God of love and power
forgive us and free us from our sins,
heal and strengthen us by God's Spirit,
and raise us to new life in Christ our Lord.

Amen.

The Collect (special prayer for today)

Almighty God, purify our hearts and minds, that when your Son Jesus Christ comes again as judge and saviour we may be ready to receive him, who is our Lord and our God

Amen

READINGS

Isaiah 40:1-11

Comfort, O comfort my people,
says your God.
Speak tenderly to Jerusalem,
and cry to her
that she has served her term,
that her penalty is paid,
that she has received from the LORD's hand
double for all her sins.

A voice cries out:

'In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD,
make straight in the desert a highway for our God.
Every valley shall be lifted up,
and every mountain and hill be made low;
the uneven ground shall become level,
and the rough places a plain.
Then the glory of the LORD shall be revealed,
and all people shall see it together,
for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.'

A voice says, 'Cry out!'

And I said, 'What shall I cry?'
All people are grass,
their constancy is like the flower of the field.
The grass withers, the flower fades,
when the breath of the LORD blows upon it;
surely the people are grass.
The grass withers, the flower fades;
but the word of our God will stand for ever.
Get you up to a high mountain,
O Zion, herald of good tidings;
lift up your voice with strength,
O Jerusalem, herald of good tidings,
lift it up, do not fear;
say to the cities of Judah,
'Here is your God!'
See, the Lord GOD comes with might,
and his arm rules for him;
his reward is with him,

and his recompense before him.
He will feed his flock like a shepherd;
he will gather the lambs in his arms,
and carry them in his bosom,
and gently lead the mother sheep.

GOSPEL READING

Mark 1:1-8

The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

As it is written in the prophet Isaiah,

‘See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you,
who will prepare your way;

the voice of one crying out in the wilderness:

“Prepare the way of the Lord,
make his paths straight” ’,

John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. Now John was clothed with camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. He proclaimed, ‘The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.’

REFLECTION

Recently, the darkness of the night sky has been greatly diminished by the brightness of the moon. The light has been strong enough to cast shadows and to do away with the need for further illumination when walking outside. And then, in the early morning, as the sun rises, the moon is still there, only now it is not the one that is lighting the way. It is so pale that compared to the sun you can barely see it. Still there, but its job is done. In the dark hours it has been the guiding light, and now it fades into the background as it is eclipsed by the brightness of the sun.

And this is strange in a way because an hour or so earlier, before the sun had risen, it had been a bright and beautiful feature which dominated the sky. Now, though it is like a beggar, and pushed into the background. Rather like a candle, previously a major source of light, having been made redundant by

the electric light. Like the candle, the faithful light of the moon, this pallid apparition, had seen people through the darkness of the night. And the moon reminds us of the Old Testament prophets, who had kept alive the hopes of the people during the long night of expectation. It was thanks to them that the flame never went out. John the Baptist was the last and the greatest of these. He worked hard to bring light to the people, and for a while he dominated the scene, enjoying great popularity. Yet he was always aware that a greater light was coming.

When that light appeared in the person of Jesus, John knew that his task was finished. He didn't hinder or seek to delay the advent of the new light. Quite the opposite, he welcomed it, and facilitated it. John was totally committed to the task that God had given to him, and he lived a life that mirrored what he preached. All of which made him a truly credible witness for Jesus. And he also was a real model of humility. Recognising that Jesus was far greater than he was - he was only the moon, whilst Jesus was the sun, and he stepped aside allowing Jesus to shine. That was a sign of greatness which Jesus later recognised as he acknowledged the debt that he owed to John.

In fact, John embodied characteristics, virtues that we should strive to achieve ourselves; commitment, self-discipline, self-sacrifice, humility, generosity of spirit, and courage. John encourages all those unselfish people who sacrifice themselves in order to let others shine; the enablers. To make way for someone else is not easy. Indeed it calls for a kind of dying to self. Some people, even great and holy people, spoil things by holding on too long to the reins of power.

As parents we spend so many years of our lives preparing the way for our children, in the sense of teaching them values and opening up the world to them. But there comes a time when we have to step aside and let them shine on their own.

It is very tempting to hug the limelight, and sometimes we quite inadvertently relegate others to the shadows. We can be so confident in our own ability and so sure that we are doing something in the best way that it can be done. As a result other people feel disheartened, discouraged, even oppressed, and a lot of light is lost to the world. It can be a difficult line to tread; we must try to shine to the best of our ability, while being careful not to block the path for others. And all the time we must be conscious of the others who prepared the way for us, giving thanks for their guiding light.

Amen

**Lord Jesus Christ, you said to your disciples, 'I am with you always'.
Be with us today, as we offer ourselves to you.
Hear our prayers for others and for ourselves,
and keep us in your care. Amen**

As we rest expectantly in God's presence, let us pray.

God of cleansing and liberating power, give us the courage and perception to see ourselves as we really are, and repent of our sin; may the whole Church be cleansed and renewed.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

God of wisdom and truth, we pray for the world's leaders and all in authority, that they may lead and govern wisely and honestly, without corruption, and for the common good.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

God of love and faithfulness, may every family be surrounded and upheld by your presence, particularly in these difficult times. May any conflicts be healed, needs provided for, and every act of kindness blessed.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

God of wholeness, bring your reassurance and healing, your hope and your patience to all who are suffering in any way; bring freedom to all imprisoned by hate or guilt, and a change of heart to all who need to forgive.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

God of unending life, bring life in its fulness to us here, and to those who have completed their time on earth. May they know the freedom and joy of your heaven.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

God of warmth and brightness, we praise you for our many blessings, and above all for coming to save us and set us free.

Merciful Father, accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

Gathering together all our prayers, we say the prayer that Jesus gave us

**Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come; thy will be done;
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation;
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
the power and the glory,
for ever and ever.
Amen**

We give thanks for the saving death and resurrection of Jesus and ask him to be with us now

**Thanks be to you, Lord Jesus Christ,
for all the benefits you have given me,
for all the pains and insults you have borne for me.
Since I cannot now receive you sacramentally,
I ask you to come spiritually into my heart.
O most merciful redeemer, friend and brother,
may I know you more clearly, love you more dearly,
and follow you more nearly, day by day. Amen**

We pray God's blessing on each other

May the Lord guard you from every danger and help you to walk always in the way that leads to salvation.

May he inspire you to lead others to Christ by the way you live.

May you never doubt that God will fulfil the promises he has made to us in Christ.

And may the blessing of God Almighty,
the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,
be with you and remain with you, and those whom you love and pray for
this day and for evermore. **Amen**

