

Commentary on the Readings for December 10, 2023

The Second Sunday in Advent

The theme of the Readings for today is clearly spelled out in both the First Reading and the Gospel. It is ***"Prepare a way for the Lord."*** This does not refer to roads or highways or, God forbid, freeways, although the First Reading does use the word "highway." What these readings are saying is: "Remove any obstacle that prevents Our Lord Jesus from coming to you in all His spiritual glory." This is a preparedness of the heart. During this busy season of the year, many people put all kinds of obstacles in the way: frustration, excesses, thoughtlessness, etc. Christ came as a simple baby. He wants us to come to Him in a similar way.

The **First Reading** is from the ***Prophet Isaiah (40:1-11)***. The prophet is speaking to the people of Israel soon after the end of the Babylonian Exile, (late 6th century BC). The Israelites are returning with new hopes and dreams and a new determination to be faithful and obedient to God. So the prophet is preaching to them to open their hearts and clear away anything that would prevent the God of Israel from entering and being with them in spirit. This was only partially successful. What would be your response today?

The **Responsorial Psalm (85:9-14)**. Here the psalmist continues the message of Isaiah above, telling his people and us that if we give our hearts to God, He will give us blessings beyond our wildest dreams, beginning with peace and all the other spiritual blessings to follow.

The **Second Reading** is from the ***Second Letter of St. Peter (3:8-14)***. In this seldom read letter, Peter admonishes us to be prepared for the coming of the Lord at our own death, as well as at the end of the world. If we look to this life only, what will we have when Christ comes for us? This world will eventually pass away, so why hang on to things of this world?

The **Gospel Reading** is from the beginning of the ***Gospel of Mark (1:1-8)***. In his opening statement, Mark repeats the line from the Prophet Isaiah about preparing a way for the Lord. This was John the Baptist's entire message and it refers to an interior or spiritual preparedness. John knew that someone "greater than he" would come soon and that everyone should be prepared. That message is as true today as it was in the time of John or Mark or even Isaiah.

In the days of the Jewish kings, it was common practice that when a king would travel, he would send out servants to make sure the roads were cleared and safe for his arrival and passage. The readings above use these images and the message but intend them to mean clearing a spiritual passage in our heart for Christ to freely enter and be with us at Christmas time. So the question is: *"What obstacles do you have that might prevent Jesus from coming to you at Christmas?"* Something to think about during your prayer time this week! **MFB**