

Fr. Nick Dant's Homily, Saint Matthew Catholic Church, Indianapolis
Second Sunday of Advent, Dec. 5-6, 2020, Cycle B

The ancient people of Israel felt bereft and alone. In 587 B.C., Judah and Jerusalem, the last vestiges of the Israelite Kingdom of David, were conquered and destroyed by the Babylonian Empire. The Israelites were in exile and felt abandoned, even forgotten by God himself. After all, had not God promised King David that his dynasty would last forever!! When David was contemplating building a temple for the Lord, the Lord told King David, I, the Lord, instead, "will establish a house for you!" God told David: "Your house and your Kingdom shall endure forever before me; your throne shall stand forever."

Now the Davidic throne lay in ashes; the nation destroyed. God's people felt themselves surrounded by darkness; in exile they felt God had reneged on His promises. The ancient Israelites were in misery and they felt there was no hope. All they could do was lament; the Psalmist sang, "By the rivers of Babylon we sat mourning and weeping when we remembered Zion."

Through the Prophet second Isaiah, though, God proclaimed words of hope to this people who felt abandoned: "Comfort, give comfort to my people," God commanded Isaiah to tell the exiles! Tell Jerusalem "her service is at an end, her guilt is expiated." For God himself will come like a Shepherd to lead his people out of exile bringing them home. So: With a voice cry out "Prepare the way of the Lord! Make straight in the wasteland a highway for our God." For your time of rescue is at hand.

Our gospel passage from Mark this weekend introduces John the Baptist with Isaiah's words of hope, identifying the Baptist as that voice crying out:

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."

John the Baptist is the true final voice crying for us to prepare the way of the Lord, for he proclaims the true restoration of the Davidic throne. John proclaims words of hope not only for the Israelites, but for all peoples: "One mightier than I is coming after me." "...He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

Every Advent we hear the Baptist proclaim the good news of the coming of the mighty one who will empower us with the life of His Spirit. God has not abandoned us to darkness, but very much wants to come and dispel darkness of our lives.

So, John the Baptist calls on us "prepare the way of the Lord," making for the Lord a straight path to enter into our lives. As the Prophet Isaiah says: we must fill in the valleys and make low all the hills and mountains, clearing every obstacle that stands in the way of God coming into our lives. Thus, John the Baptist calls for repentance in our lives, in short, removing the mountains of sin in our lives, so the Lord will have a clear, smooth road into our hearts. There is no better way to clear our lives of all valleys, mountains, and raggedness than by celebrating the Sacrament of Reconciliation – leveling all for the Lord to enter into our hearts this Advent and be the true center of our lives.