

2nd Sunday of Advent B

First Reading Isaiah 40:1-5.9-11

"Console my people, console them" says your God. "Speak to the heart of Jerusalem and call to her that her time of service is ended, that her sin is atoned for, that she has received from the hand of the Lord double punishment for all her crimes." A voice cries, "Prepare in the wilderness a way for the Lord. Make a straight highway for our God across the desert. Let every valley be filled in, every mountain and hill be laid low, let every cliff become a plain, and the ridges a valley; then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed and all mankind shall see it; for the mouth of the Lord has spoken." Go up on a high mountain, joyful messenger to Zion. Shout with a loud voice, joyful messenger to Jerusalem. Shout without fear, say to the towns of Judah, "Here is your God." Here is the Lord coming with power, his arm subduing all things to him. The prize of his victory is with him, his trophies all go before him. He is like a shepherd feeding his flock, gathering lambs in his arms, holding them against his breast and leading to their rest the mother ewes.

Second Reading 2 Peter 3:8-14

There is one thing, my friends, that you must never forget: that with the Lord, "a day" can mean a thousand years, and a thousand years is like a day. The Lord is not being slow to carry out his promises, as anybody else might be called slow; but he is being patient with you all, wanting nobody to be lost and everybody to be brought to change his ways. The Day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then with a roar the sky will vanish, the elements will catch fire and fall apart, the earth and all that it contains will be burnt up. Since everything is coming to an end like this, you should be living holy and saintly lives while you wait and long for the Day of God to come, when the sky will dissolve in flames and the elements melt in the heat. What we are waiting for is what he promised: the new heavens and new earth, the place where righteousness will be at home. So then, my friends, while you are waiting, do your best to live lives without spot or stain so that he will find you at peace.

Gospel Mark 1:1-8

The beginning of the Good News about Jesus Christ the Son of God. It is written in the book of the prophet Isaiah: Look, I am going to send my messenger before you; he will prepare your way. A voice cries in the wilderness: Prepare a way for the Lord, make his paths straight, and so it was that John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

All Judaea and all the people of Jerusalem made their way to him, and as they were baptised by him in the river Jordan they confessed their sins. John wore a garment of camel-skin, and he lived on locusts and wild honey. In the course of his preaching he said, "Someone is following me, someone who is more powerful than I am, and I am not fit to kneel down and undo the strap of his sandals.

I have baptised you with water, but he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit."

Meditation

Today's readings proclaim the great promise of Advent: the Lord will come. The message is double-edged. It offers both threat and comfort. The Second Letter of Peter foresees a terrible holocaust.

When the Lord comes, the earth will be swallowed up in fire. Deutero-Isaiah envisions a glorious return from exile. When the Lord comes, the earth will be renewed. John the Baptist holds the key to the paradox. When the Lord comes, he will pour out upon the earth the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

In the purifying fire of conversion the world as we have known it in its sin passes away; from the ashes of its evil emerge the new heavens and the new earth, the promised kingdom of God. We are right to anticipate its coming with joy and yet with dread. We are the world to be transformed in the fire of the Spirit. Yet the Lord whom we anticipate has already come among us. The power of the Spirit has been unleashed upon the world. The waters of baptism are being poured out. The work of transformation is at hand. It commits us both to exile and to promise. We must continually leave behind the former earth, the former society, the former self marked by sin, dear though they may be in their familiarity.

We must continually look forward to the kingdom "where the justice of God will reside" as it comes into being to fulfil our every hope. It is uncomfortable to be an Advent people, caught between a world that is dying and a world being born. Yet we may not stand idle between history and promise.

We have work to do. There are valleys of want to be filled in, mountains of injustice to be brought low. We have a highway to build for our God through the wilderness of our hearts and our societies.

To us it is given to make ready the new heavens and the new earth so that the message of the Lord's coming may indeed be good news to all the world.