

## **The Second Sunday of Advent – a liturgy for worship at home**

*If you have an Advent wreath or simply four candles to mark the Advent countdown to Christmas Day, you may like to light two candles and say the following:*

People of God: awake! Your God delights in you, giving you joy for sadness and turning the dark to light. Be strong in hope, therefore; for our God comes to save. You are God's children.

**Lord, make us one in the love of Christ today and for ever.**

### **Introduction**

Networks of roads are built to make communications and exchange easy, fast and safe. The question for us as Christians is: what efforts are we making to construct roads that lead to God and to one another? We are supposed to be a pilgrim people, a people constantly on the way to God and because of God's love for the world, a people who are reaching out, building pathways and bridges to others we share life with on this planet. Today, the voice of the prophet tries to wake us up. He calls us to prepare the way of the Lord, make your paths smooth and straight, that they may be roads leading to God: roads of conversion, justice and freedom.

### **Act of Penitence**

A voice cries out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord.' So let us listen, and turn to the Lord in penitence and faith.

Heavenly Father, you call us to repent of our sins: soften our proud and stubborn hearts.

Lord, have mercy.

Lord Jesus, you declared the forgiveness of God: teach us to forgive one another.

Christ, have mercy.

Holy Spirit, you search our hearts and show us the truth: direct us in your way of righteousness.

Lord, have mercy.

Almighty God, who in Jesus Christ has given us a kingdom that cannot be destroyed, forgive us our sins, open our eyes to your truth, strengthen us to do your will and give us the joy of your kingdom, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

## **Act of Praise**

*Traditionally, the Gloria is not said or sung in Advent. However, if you have a suitable hymn book you may like to say or sing an Advent hymn such as 'O come, O come Emmanuel,' 'Come thou long expected Jesus,' 'Hills of the north, rejoice,' or some other suitable hymn.*

## **Collect of the Day**

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, our Lord and our God. Amen.

## **Today's readings**

*A reading from the prophet 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 forever.  
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  
*This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.*  
*Psalm 85: 1 – 2 & 8 – 13*

Lord, you were gracious to your land; you restored the fortunes of Jacob.

You forgave the offence of your people and covered all their sins.

I will listen to what the Lord God will say, for he shall speak peace to his people and to the faithful, that they turn not again to folly.

Truly, his salvation is near to those who fear him, that his glory may dwell in our land.

Mercy and truth are met together, righteousness and peace have kissed each other;

Truth shall spring up from the earth and righteousness look down from heaven.

The Lord will indeed give all that is good, and our land will yield its increase.

Righteousness shall go before him and direct his steps in the way.

*Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.*

*A reading from the second letter of St Peter*

*(3: 8 – 15a)*

Do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like one day. The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some think of slowness, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fire, and the earth and everything that is done on it will be disclosed. Since all these things are to be dissolved in this way, what sort of persons ought you to be in leading lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set ablaze and dissolved, and the elements will melt with fire? But, in accordance with his promise, we wait for new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness is at home. Therefore, beloved, while you are waiting for these things, strive to be found by him at peace, without spot or blemish; and regard the patience of our Lord as salvation.

*This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.*

*Acclamation to greet the Gospel:*

Alleluia, Alleluia!

Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight,  
and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.

Alleluia!

*Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Mark (13: 24 – 37)*  
*Glory to you, O Lord.*

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 baptiser 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 baptised 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 baptised you with water; but he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit.’

*This is the Gospel of the Lord. Praise to you, O Christ*

### **Homily**

After the trials and tribulations of 2020, I expect we are all looking forward to a new year, and certainly a way forward out of the misery of the pandemic for which the recent advent of vaccines has provided some real hope. I have to confess though, that sociable as I am, I have never been particularly excited about the change of the calendar year on 8<sup>th</sup> day of Christmas, and many a year has passed since I last bothered to stay up till past midnight to notice that 1<sup>st</sup> January had arrived. Although it is important to some of us, it is, after all, just one new year date among several that are celebrated throughout the world. For all of us personally, new years begin at various times including our birthdays. Schools and colleges begin their new year in September and October, although in Australia it is the beginning of February after the long summer holiday which begins at Christmas. As Christians we began a new year last Sunday as the season of Advent dawned. But whenever they begin, new

years are a useful time for new beginnings, new resolutions, new hopes for better times and perhaps better efforts in life.

Our readings today are principally about new beginnings. And in the Old Testament and Gospel readings we have the actual beginnings of biblical writings. Isaiah 40 is the start of a new prophetic work, 16 chapters long, often called the 'book of consolation of Israel,' written to comfort and encourage the Israelites who were exiled in Babylon in the mid-6<sup>th</sup> century BC. The prophet's name is unknown, but his work was added to the writings of his spiritual predecessor and hero, Isaiah of Jerusalem, who lived some 150 to 200 years earlier. There is also a later prophet, and maybe more than one, who concludes the book of the prophecies under the name of Isaiah. The prophet we read today is commonly called Second Isaiah, and he is arguably the greatest of the Old Testament prophets and certainly the most inspiring.

And for the Gospel reading we have the beginning of the Gospel of Mark, the Gospel which will guide us on most of the Sundays of this new liturgical year. Mark is the shortest of the four Gospels and now almost universally accepted as the first Gospel to be written. Before Mark, the only Christian writings in existence that we definitely know about were the letters of Paul to the various Churches, probably all written in the 50s of the first century, at least the 7 letters that are indisputably his own writing rather than those compiled later by a disciple of his.

But in or around the year 70, some 40 years after the historical life of Jesus, an early Christian known later as Mark put the story of Jesus into writing for the first time. It was during a time of war, the Jewish revolt against Roman rule, which resulted in Jerusalem being devastated and the temple destroyed. It was catastrophic. Jewish belief held that God was especially present in the temple, and that God had promised to protect Jerusalem and the temple forever.

This is the context in which Mark wrote his Gospel, his good news about Jesus. Like Second Isaiah writing to a people in dire straits following the destruction of the first temple and their forced exile to a foreign land, Mark's Gospel could also be described as a book of consolation. For it showed that God was still with his people. In Jesus the presence of God was much nearer and greater than in any temple.

Mark begins with an overture, something that anticipates the central themes of the Gospel as a whole. He writes, 'The beginning of the gospel or good news

of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. The sense is that the whole book is but a beginning. It is good news that continues to unfold. It is not just about the past. It is also about Mark and his community's present. And it is about our present.

Verses 2 and 3 of Mark's overture announce a major theme of the Gospel. The good news is about the 'way of the Lord.' He writes, '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 in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.' The language is drawn from the Old Testament, including today's first reading. For Mark, these verses point forward to John the Baptist but they have a much broader meaning too. They name one of Mark's major themes: the 'way,' also translated from the Greek as path or road. The first Christians were called the people of the Way. It meant the Jesus way.

The way is the particular focus of Mark's account of the fateful journey of Jesus to Jerusalem. Three times in that section Jesus refers to his forthcoming execution by the authorities, and after each he speaks to his disciples about following him, following him on his way. That way leads to Jerusalem, to the place of confrontation with the powers, to death and resurrection.

Many Christians have followed and continue to follow the way of Jesus most literally. Their discipleship, their following of him has led to conflict with the prevailing powers, political or otherwise, and has resulted in suffering and death. But for all of us, faithfully following the way of Jesus will bring us to question and often challenge many of the assumptions and conventions of our cultures, communities, and countries. The way of Jesus followed faithfully leads us to engage in a process of personal and community transformation, the dying to an old life and the rising to a new life, as pledged and symbolised in our baptism. It enables us to open our eyes and see the Jesus way more clearly, the way of compassion and justice, the way of healing and reconciliation, the way of service and self-giving, the way of life that is centred in God.

The imagery of Second Isaiah is most appropriate. We are being continually called to repentance, which really means to change our mind, to return as it were from our exile, our old ways, our sin, and like the prodigal son begin the journey back to the Father's house, the place where God is, to the new temple

not built by stones, to Jesus who embodies most fully the presence and the loving way of life that God desires for us all.

As we considered last Sunday, in Advent we are called to begin again, as it were, to follow the Jesus way. We begin again a journey through worship to explore the major themes of his life. And we do this not principally to remember his past but to transform our present, to deepen our life in the living Christ, to continue to persevere along the road, the way, that Jesus has walked, until he tells us that the journey is over and we can move on to enjoy the fullness of life in him eternally.

*A few moments of silent reflection is recommended*

**The Profession of Faith**, *either the following or one of the traditional creeds:*

*We believe in God the Father from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named.*

*We believe in God the Son, who lives in our hearts through faith, and fills us with his love.*

*We believe in God the Holy Spirit, who strengthens us with power from on high. We believe in one God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.*

### **Prayers of Intercession**

Mighty God, give us faith like John the Baptist, strong and brave enough to believe and proclaim your Gospel. Make our heart strong like his, not swayed by trials or snared by false pleasures. Give us courage to be faithful until your promises are fulfilled.

**Lord, in your Mercy..... Hear our Prayer**

Holy God, we pray for the church around the world; for missionaries and evangelists and all who bravely name Jesus as Lord and Saviour, even under persecution. Protect and keep them and according to your promises may your Word not be returned void. We give thanks for Archbishop Justin, Bishops Robert and David, may they be daily filled with your Holy Spirit making them bold to preach your Gospel.

We lift to you our own church of St. Francis, John and Rosemary, and all who faithfully serve you here in both large and small ways. We give you all the

thanks and glory for the work of our charity shop and ask that it will continue to be a light to the village of Los Gigantes. We also pray that our new website will be an inspired tool of mission and increase our ability to communicate our presence and ministry in Tenerife.

**Lord, in your Mercy..... Hear our Prayer**

Creator God, we pray for those whose responsibility it is to manage the world's economy, and for those who have difficult ethical decisions to make; we pray for wisdom and courage to do what is right. We pray for all who are struggling throughout the world, especially where fragile economies and international friendship and understanding are threatened. We pray for the governments of the world especially the United Kingdom and Spain as they manage the Pandemic, and for the United States as they also undergo a time of governmental confusion.

**Lord, in your Mercy: Hear our Prayer**

Loving God, all the needs of your children are already known to you and so with God given love we bring to mind, in a short time of silence those who are suffering physically, spiritually or emotionally, that they may find you there beside them in these dark and painful times. We especially bring before you Margaret Rainton and Carol Hart and ask for your healing hand to be upon them.

**Lord, in your Mercy: Hear our Prayer**

Gracious God we pray for those whose remaining time here on earth is short. May they know your comfort and great love for them.

For those now departed may they know the eternal peace of heaven, and may those who miss them be comforted.

**Lord, in your Mercy: Hear our Prayer**

Merciful God, who sent John the Baptist to preach repentance and prepare the way for our salvation; Give us grace to take heed of his warnings and to turn away from our own waywardness so that we may greet with joy the coming of Jesus Christ our Redeemer.

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

God does not delay his promise. With all trust we pray to him the prayer of Jesus our Lord.

**Our Father.....**

*You may wish to offer this or an alternative prayer of spiritual communion, and/or in silence just sit in the peace of the ever-present Lord for a while.*

In union, dear Father, with Christian people throughout the world and across the centuries gathered to make Eucharist, hearing your holy Word and receiving the Precious Body and Blood, I offer you praise and thanksgiving. Even though I am exiled from tasting the Bread of Heaven and drinking the Cup of Life, I pray that you will unite me with all the baptised and with your Son who gave his life for us. Come Lord Jesus, dwell in me and send your Holy Spirit that I may be filled with your presence. Amen.

### **Concluding Prayer**

God of life and love, the poverty of the disinherited and the disgust of the over-satisfied cry out for someone to hope in. Show your Son to all the world as you have shown him to us. May he go ahead of us as we walk the road that leads to solidarity with one another and unites us with you. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

### **Final Reflection and Blessing**

In this act of worship the Lord has reminded us in his Word of his mercy, compassion and faithfulness. Let his faithfulness spring from our earth and his peace and justice dawn on us. This is how this Advent we will make Christ present in our world and how we will console and warm the hearts of one another.

May Christ the Sun of righteousness shine upon us, scatter the darkness before our path and make us ready to meet him when he comes to us. And the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit be with us and remain with us and upon all who are on our hearts, today and always. Amen.

Let us go and prepare in hope the way for the Lord's coming to all. Thanks be to God.