

Second Sunday in Advent  
December 10, 2017  
Fr. Rick Lorenz

## Reflection

Have you noticed how everything seems to be happening before Christmas? Travelling, parties, Christmas cards, shopping, cooking, cleaning: preparation packed into short weeks; all to make ready for encounters with loved ones, to restore relationships that we normally neglect.

The catechism tells us that "The coming of God's Son to earth is an event of such immensity that God willed to prepare for it over centuries (522)." He instituted a covenant with the chosen people, knowing full well that many would not abide by its terms. Prophets reminded them of their sins and spoke of God's mercy. They began to focus on what God would do: he would send a virtuous Messiah to free them; a Saviour who would suffer for them; a Servant whose spirit would renew their hearts with a new law, gathering them from distant corners, transforming them into the heirs of his kingdom, and finally dwelling among them in a reign of peace. God would prepare the people for the arrival of the Messiah, and would include them in his work. "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." Travelling through Israel makes it clear that the mountains remain.

Is 40:1-5, 9-11  
Ps 85  
2 Pet 3:8-14  
Mk 1:1-8

Isaiah isn't speaking shaping the land, but transforming a remnant of the people; the lowly raised to hope, the high-born reduced to humility. God established the people of the poor: reliant, humble and meek; yet awaiting his consolation. "They are the great achievement of the Holy Spirit's hidden mission during the time of the promises that prepare for Christ's coming (716)."

John the Baptist was the final prophet who surpassed the rest. He welcomed Christ by leaping in the womb of Elizabeth, and rejoiced at the sight of the Lamb of God. He bore witness to Christ by his preaching and his martyrdom. According to the Gospel, "John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins." Filled with the fire of the Holy Spirit, he completed the preparation of the people through this baptism, which began their restoration. It would continue with Christ. In his name we are baptized with the Holy Spirit. Our sins are forgiven, we are made members of the Church, the Holy Spirit dwells within us, and we become adopted as children of God.

But is baptism the end? For those in the RCIA program, it will definitely be a climatic moment. But we can borrow some words of Winston Churchill. He spoke of the progress of the war after the allies' first major victory: the Battle of Egypt in 1942.

"Now this is not the end. It is not even the beginning of the end. But it is, perhaps, the end of the beginning." Baptism is the gateway to the sacraments, and the beginning of eternal life. The psalm tells us that "Faithfulness will spring up from the ground, and righteousness will look down from the sky." Nourished by the sacraments, the faithful look to heaven with yearning and the beginnings of joy that will be fulfilled in the age to come. Righteousness gazes down, beams of love that light the path and lighten the load; permitting conversion to deepen according to the patient ways of God; continuing to prepare us for "new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness is at home," and God will dwell with his people.

For this Eucharist, we pray that catechumens may continue to prepare for the sacraments, and that God may speed our advent preparations for Christmas.