

Reflection: Second Sunday of Advent Mark 1:1-8

- *“The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; upon those who dwelt in the land of gloom a light has shone.” Isaiah 9:2*
- It seems a little dark and gloomy out there, doesn't it?
- There are patches of darkness in our individual lives. Caring for an ill family member or friend. Dealing with our own ailments or strained relationships. Loss of a job; a tough decision to make.
- On top of these things add a worldwide pandemic.
- It can seem a little dark and gloomy out there.
- But on this second week of Advent our Church reminds us to look for and to look toward the light: God's great love and God's great care for us (a vaccine is coming!!)
- In this Sunday's scriptures our reading set before us two voices, two points of light in the darkness.
- We first hear from the prophet Isaiah.
- Isaiah spoke at a time that was not easy for God's people. The great leaders of Israel were gone. The people of Israel were living in exile. They were defeated by the armies of Babylon; and their homeland Jerusalem was destroyed.
- Into that darkness God sent a voice. The prophet Isaiah
- And as we see in our first reading, Isaiah proclaimed a message of peace – they belonged to God, God cared. Isaiah's message was one of hope. Things would be good again, God would see to it if they trusted.
- Isaiah's message still shines as a beacon of light for us and our world today. We belong to God. He cares for us. Things will be good again if we trust in Him.
- In our gospel reading today we see that second point of light, we hear the voice of John the Baptist. And John's message is have hope – and prepare. John urges us to prepare for our encounter with God by repenting for our

sins. He calls us to live changed lives. Lives of prayer and good works.

- I had a wonderful teacher in the seminary, Father William Smith, who would tell us he loved John the Baptist because John was a perfect model for Christians to imitate. Fr. Smith said there were four important things to observe about John the Baptist.
- First, John knew who he wasn't – knew who he wasn't! John knew he was not the messiah. Although many thought he was. John had many followers – he could have abused that popularity and used it for his own gain. But he didn't mislead people, didn't take advantage of the situation. John made it very clear to everyone where their focus should be – on Jesus.
- Second, John knew who he was – knew who he was! He truly understood the joy of being a child of God. He understood we belong to God. God formed us in the womb. God loves us for who we are. God protects us, we are safe in Jesus. John once said: "I am delighted in having a share in the love of Jesus, it gives me more satisfaction than following any plan I have for myself."
- Third, John knew his job. He realized God had a plan for his life. His life had a purpose. So John trusted and "went with the plan". He clearly understood he was chosen as a herald, a voice crying out to "prepare the way of the Lord". His job was to call people (including us) to repent for their sins, to be baptized, to live changed lives – lives of prayer and good works.
- Fourth, John knew when to get out of the way. He knew when to step aside and let the Lord take over. He did this in two ways. Publicly of course as Jesus began His public ministry, John pointed others away from himself and toward Jesus. But just as important, perhaps more important, privately and spiritually, John knew the importance of letting the Lord take over.

- One of John's famous sayings is "He must increase, I must decrease". John is not saying I am getting out of the baptism business now that Jesus is here. John is saying something more personal and profound. He is saying: "Jesus, let your ways increase in me (ways of goodness, love, service, holiness, mercy). And to make room for you Jesus, let my ways decrease (my faults, fears, limitations, weaknesses)."
- So our challenge in the darkness is to focus on the great light –Jesus. And to try to be the type of disciple John was.
- Like John we need to remember who we are not. We are not God- we are human. We make mistakes, we sin. So we need to remember to be humble, less judgmental of others (an easy trap to fall into!). We need to repent and ask for God's forgiveness. And we need to accept that forgiveness and not be paralyzed by our guilt. If God forgives us we have to forgive ourselves.
- Like John we need to remember who we are. We are children of God. He loves us. We are important to God. God thinks about us. God wants good things for us.
- We need to think more about that, especially in these trying times. We need to take great comfort and joy in being God's children.
- Like John we need to realize we have a job to do. God has a plan for your life and my life – our lives have a purpose.
- In many ways our job is like that of John the Baptist. As Catholics we are modern day heralds. We are to be the voices crying out in today's world. A world full of people desperate to hear that God loves them, to hear their lives matter. It is our job to deliver that message – to point others to Jesus by what we say and what we do everyday.
- How we do this will be a little different for each of us. God has given each of us different skills, different

talents. He has placed us in certain jobs, schools, and communities. Different circles of family and friends. But the essence of the job will always be the same as that of John the Baptist – point people to Jesus. As Saint Therese once said: “Grow where you are planted”.

- And finally, like John, we need to know how to step aside and let the Lord take over our lives.
- Maybe we are finding it hard to love someone, maybe we are facing problems at work or home that seem impossible to solve.
- Sometimes we have to realize we can't control everything, can't understand everything or everyone – but God can!
- Like John we need to step aside and let the Lord take over. We need to step aside from fears and doubts and worries and anxiety and frustration. We need to get out of our own way and let God have room to work in us and through us.
- John the Baptist knew this. He prayed. He listened and let the Holy Spirit guide him.
- And John gave us that beautiful one line prayer, to help us do the same, to help us see the light in the darkness:
- “ He must increase, I must decrease.”