**"Jerusalem, herald of good news!
Fear not to cry out
and say to the cities of Judah:
Here is your God!"
- Isaiah 40**

Second Week of Advent: Dec. 4 - 10, 2011

Second Week of Advent

In the **Second Sunday of Advent** we hear Isaiah write of a voice that cries out in the wilderness, "Prepare the way of the LORD! Make straight in the wasteland a highway for our God!" These lines from the prophet are repeated in the **Mark's Gospel** as we are introduced to John the Baptist who prepares the way for Jesus. John says, "One mightier than I is coming after me. I am not worthy to stoop and loosen the thongs of his sandals. I have baptized you with water; he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

Wednesday is the **Memorial of Saint Ambrose, bishop and doctor of the Church**. Thursday is the **Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary**, with its own special readings.

We focus on the first readings from the Prophet **Isaiah** this week. With the Babylonian Captivity, the temple was destroyed, the leaders of the people were taken away to Babylon and a remnant was left behind. A life-threatening desert separated the people. In this context, Isaiah proclaims God's vindication of the people in exile. The desert will be reborn. A highway will bring their liberation. And the signs will be that there is healing and peace. "Comfort, give comfort to my people," says the Lord. The valleys will be filled in the mountains leveled - every obstacle will be overcome - to build a highway for our God to come and save us. The people can hardly believe the good news. They are weak and weary of their captivity. Isaiah proclaims, "They that hope in the LORD will renew their strength, they will soar as with eagles' wings." The people have been at a distance from the Lord for some

Daily Prayer This Week

Finding intimacy with God in the midst of our busy lives begins with getting in touch with our own desires. Advent is a wonderful time to ask myself, "What am I looking for? What do I desire? What longing can I recognize in my heart?" The answers to those questions will be our best guide for daily prayer. The readings this week offer some ways to talk with the Lord about our desires.

We can begin by trying to get in touch with a part of my heart that is divided, perhaps with a desert separating the two parts. For example, is there a disconnect between my primary commitments and the amount of time and attention that I give to them? Is there a distance between who I say I am, and who I actually am? Do I experience something missing between what I believe and how I live those beliefs? We all have these contradictions and inconsistencies within us. These are the places into which we can let our Advent desiring grow. This week, we can imagine the prophet saying, "there will be a path between what is separate or divided or at a distance in your life!" "What is desert, barren, dry, life-less in you will come to life!" "You will find freedom and comfort, where you have been finding yourself in a captivity to pattern and routine, where you have felt weak and weary." "Learn from the Lord and learn real wisdom."

When one or more of these desires really strikes a chord in our hearts, Advent begins for us. Each morning this week, we can turn to our God, when we first wake up, while in the shower or getting dressed, and simply

time and were not obeying the commandments. The Lord says, “I am the LORD, your God, who grasp your right hand; It is I who say to you, 'Fear not, I will help you.'” God promises them that if they follow his teachings, “Your descendants would be like the sand... their name never cut off or blotted out from my presence.” The final first reading this week is a piece from the book of **Sirach** in which the prophet Elijah is praised. Elijah, who was destined to come again to restore order before the day of the Lord, is seen in the reading from **Matthew's Gospel** to be John the Baptist.

The Third Sunday of Advent offers us more of the promise. The words used by the **prophet Isaiah** to describe God's vindication are the ones Jesus points to as describing his own mission: “The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me; he has sent me to bring glad tidings to the poor, to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and release to the prisoners, to announce a year of favor from the LORD and a day of vindication by our God.”

ask: “Come, Lord. Come into this place, into this embarrassing place of need in my life.” We may be able to be specific and ask, “Please, Lord, come and be with me and bring life and hope into my morning as I face this meeting.” As we go to work or do laundry or go shopping, or head home from work, we might ask even more specifically for the grace to love - to take the liberating journey across the desert and let the Lord bring us home to a place of comfort, healing and peace.

Advent is about our coming to a felt sense of our need for a Savior and letting our Savior into our hearts to save us. Advent comes alive for us as we identify our desires and let them be expressed as longing and expectant hope. Into this space our Lord comes with good news, healing and a peace the world can't give. As we taste our desires and longing grow, we can give thanks each evening before we go to bed, to acknowledge we are being given a great grace of a growing intimacy with our God, right in the mist of our very busy days.

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