

**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.'

**A REFLECTION  
BY POPE FRANCIS**

Last Sunday we began Advent with the call to be vigilant; today, the Second Sunday of this season of preparation for Christmas, the liturgy indicates to us its proper content: it is a time to recognize the *shortcomings* in our life, to *smooth out the roughness* of pride and to make room for Jesus who comes.

The Prophet Isaiah addresses the people, proclaiming the end of the Exile in Babylon and the return to Jerusalem. He prophesies: "A voice cries: 'In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord... Every valley shall be lifted up'" (40:3-4). The valleys to be lifted up represent all the shortcomings of our behaviour before God, all our sins of omission. One shortcoming in our life could be the fact that we do not pray or that we pray little. Advent is thus a favourable time to pray with greater intensity, to reserve to the spiritual life the important place it deserves. Another shortcoming could be a lack

of charity for our neighbour, above all toward people most in need of help, not only material, but also spiritual. We are called to be more attentive, closer, to the needs of others. Like John the Baptist, in this way we can open the ways of hope in the desert of the barren hearts of many people.

"Every mountain and hill shall be made low" (cf. v. 4), Isaiah again exhorts. The mountains and hills that must be made low are pride, arrogance, insolence. Where there is pride, where there is insolence, where there is arrogance, the Lord cannot enter because that heart is full of pride, of insolence, of arrogance. For this reason, we must allay this pride. We must take on attitudes of meekness and humility, without reproach, to listen, to speak with meekness and thus to prepare for the coming of our Saviour, He who is meek and humble of heart (cf. Mt 11:29). Then we are asked to eliminate all obstacles that we set against our union with the Lord: "the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed" — says Isaiah — "and all flesh shall see it together" (40:4-5). These actions, however, must be performed with joy, because they are designed in preparation for the coming of Jesus. At home, when we await the visit of a dear person, we prepare everything with care and gladness. In the same way, we want to prepare ourselves for the coming of the Lord: to await him each day attentively, so as to be filled by his grace when he comes.

The Saviour whom we await is able to transform our life with his grace, with the power of the Holy Spirit, with the power of love. The Holy Spirit, in fact, infuses our hearts with God's love, the inexhaustible source of purification, of new life and freedom. The Virgin Mary fully lived this reality, allowing herself to be 'baptized' by the Holy Spirit who inundated her with his power. May she, who prepared for the coming of Christ with the totality of her existence, help us to follow her example and may she guide our steps to the coming Lord.

**REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

- Pope Francis suggests that the mountains and hills that must be made low are pride, arrogance, insolence. Where there is pride, where there is insolence, where there is arrogance, the Lord cannot enter. How have you found this to be true in your own life?
- We can see the valleys as representing all the shortcomings of our behaviour before God, all our sins of omission. What might this look like in your life?
- The Good News is that through our relationship with Jesus all of these negative behaviours can be forgiven and overcome. What has been your experience of having Jesus in your life and overcoming some of these behaviours?

**PRAYER**

*Spend some time in prayer  
with one another*

1. Conscious of what has just been shared, members briefly name/describe their prayer needs.
2. Intentionally call on the Holy Spirit to be present (e.g. "Come Holy Spirit, please be present as we pray")
3. Move to prayers of thanks and praise to God.
4. Pray for each others' prayer needs. Where appropriate, you may like to encourage the group to place a hand on the shoulder of the individual that you are currently praying for.
5. Conclude your prayer time with another prayer of praise, perhaps reciting the 'Glory Be' or similar prayer.