

**GOSPEL***Luke 3:1–6*

In the fifteenth year of Tiberius Caesar's reign, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judaea, Herod tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of the lands of Ituraea and Trachonitis, Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene, during the pontificate of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah, in the wilderness. He went through the whole Jordan district proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, as it is written in the book of the sayings of the prophet Isaiah:

A voice cries in the wilderness;  
Prepare a way for the Lord,  
make his paths straight.  
Every valley will be filled in,  
every mountain and hill be laid low,  
winding ways will be straightened  
and rough roads made smooth.  
And all mankind shall see the salvation of God.

**A REFLECTION BY POPE FRANCIS***9 December 2018*

Last Sunday, the liturgy invited us to experience the Season of Advent and of anticipation of the Lord with an attitude of vigilance and also of prayer: “be mindful” and “pray”. Today, the Second Sunday of Advent, we are shown how to give substance to this anticipation: by undertaking a journey of conversion, how to make this anticipation concrete. As a guide on this journey, the Gospel presents the figure of John the Baptist who “went into all the region about the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins” (Lk 3:3). To describe the Baptist's mission, the Evangelist Luke refers to the ancient prophecy of Isaiah which says: “The voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. Every valley shall be filled and every mountain and hill shall be brought low” (vv. 4-5).

To prepare the way of the Lord's coming, it is necessary to take note of the requirements of conversion to which the Baptist invites us. What are these requirements for conversion? First of all we are called to fill the ‘valleys’ caused by coldness and indifference, opening ourselves to others with the same sentiments as Jesus,

that is, with affection and fraternal attention which takes on the needs of our neighbours. To fill the valleys caused by coldness. One cannot have a relationship of love, charity and fraternity with one's neighbours if there are ‘gaps’ just as one cannot travel a road with many potholes. This requires a change of attitude. And all this should also be done with special attention to the neediest. Then there is the need to curtail the indifference caused by pride and arrogance. How many people, perhaps without realizing it, are proud, are indifferent, lack that kindly relationship. It is necessary to overcome this by making concrete gestures of reconciliation with our brothers and sisters, asking for forgiveness for our faults. It is not easy to reconcile with another. One always thinks: “who will take the first step?”. The Lord helps us in this if we are of good will. Indeed, conversion is complete if it leads us to humbly recognize our errors, our infidelity and failings.

The believer is someone who, by being close to his brothers and sisters, like John the Baptist, opens pathways in the desert, that is, he indicates perspectives of hope, even in those existential contexts that are arduous, marked by failure and defeat. We cannot give up in the face of negative situations of closure and rejection: we must not allow ourselves to succumb to the mentality of the world, because the centre of our life is Jesus and his word of light, love and solace. It is He! The Baptist invited the people of his time to conversion, with force, with vigour and with firmness. Nevertheless, he knew how to listen, he knew how to perform gestures of tenderness, gestures of forgiveness toward the multitude of men and women who went to him to confess their sins and to be baptized with the baptism of repentance.

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The witness of John the Baptist helps us to go forward in our witness of life. The purity of his proclamation, his courage in proclaiming the truth were able to reawaken the expectation and hope in the Messiah that had long been dormant. Today too, Jesus' disciples are called to be his humble but courageous witnesses in order to rekindle hope, to make it understood that, despite everything, the Kingdom of God continues to be built day by day with the power of the Holy Spirit. Let each of us ask ourselves: how can I change something in my attitude, in order to prepare the way of the Lord?

May the Virgin Mary help us prepare the way of the Lord day by day, beginning with ourselves; and to scatter around us with steadfast patience, seeds of peace, justice and fraternity.

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

What stood out to you from the Gospel or Reflection/ Homily?



**Head:** What is the biggest obstacle in seeking or offering forgiveness and reconciliation to those that have hurt us?



**Heart:** It is easy to think of the "valleys" or "potholes" as being outside ourselves, rather than present in each of us. Do you experience coldness or indifference in your heart? Is there someone you need to forgive or seek forgiveness from? What's stopping you?



**Hands:** How might we extend love and mercy to those around us this week?

## 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 (for example, "Come Holy Spirit, please be present as we pray")
3. Offer 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 praying the 'Glory Be'.