

- *Prepare the way of the Lord.*
 - Our whole Gospel this week is just a few sentences long: to set the context for the revelation to John the Baptist and to share his voice crying out in the desert to prepare the way for Christ.
 - This is the story of Advent. Advent is the season of expectant waiting and increased listening for the Lord who comes to us and asks us to prepare the way.

- Sometimes the Word of God is dramatic:
 - It came to Moses in the burning bush.
 - And to Jacob as a wrestling match.
 - Saint Paul got knocked off his horse.
- Other times, the Word of God comes in the exercise of daily life
 - For the pregnant Elizabeth, it came through the child within her womb
 - For the Shepherds, it came while tending their flock;
 - For the astrologers or wise men, the appearance of the star

- More often than not, though, the Word of God comes to us in the quiet
 - For John the Baptist, it came in the quiet of the desert, free from all distraction.
 - For Mary at the Annunciation, the Word of God came to her in prayer;
 - For Saint Joseph, a dream in the quiet of the night
 - For Simeon and Anna, the Word came because they waited and prayed, night and day in the Temple

- It's not only in those days. The Word of God continues to come right down to our own day in ways no less diverse.
 - For Edith Stein and Maximilian Kolbe it came in the concentration camps where they met their deaths.
 - For Saint Teresa of Calcutta, it was the beggar in the gutter that she could not step over.
 - For Dorothy Day the Word came in her personal struggles and in the plight of the poor.
 - For Saint Elizabeth Anne Seton in her grief and in the Eucharist.
 - For Blessed Stanley Rother, a priest from a farming family in Oklahoma beatified this just past September, it came in martyrdom in Guatemala while preaching the gospel of non-violence and love.

- And it's not just the saints or in far off lands:
 - The Word of God comes in the difficulties of the many sick and struggling in our community,
 - in the need of those reached by our Helping Hands program.
 - It came in heartfelt testimonies of those touched through Alpha and in the confessions of those who have sought the mercy of God.
 - It came in the hopeful, joyful message of our children in religious education.
 - And it comes in the needs, hesitation and doubts of those listed on our banner in the narthex and the board at Saint Mary.

- *Prepare the way of the Lord.*

- The Word of God comes to us and asks us to proclaim the Gospel, to prepare the way for Christ in the hearts and lives around us.

- Sometimes, I think we're a little intimidated to allow Christ to engage us, to tell our story, to share our faith.
 - We don't want to act the crazy, the holy roller, we don't want to scare anybody, force anybody, or challenge anybody.
 - After all, who are we to do so? I don't know enough. What if they ask me a question I can't answer? What if they get mad at me for foisting my beliefs on them?

- Think for a moment, though. Nothing is more convincing than word of mouth, the personal testimony of one we know.
 - We do it regularly, don't we, even without thinking about it. We have a good experience with products we buy, services we use or professionals we know.
 - When we learn of something good, we want to share it. We don't think we need to know everything about the product or force the other person to use or to buy it, we just want to share the good experience we have had.
 - Why not then try the same thing with the most important blessing we have: our faith **in** and relationship **with** Jesus Christ?
- *Prepare the way of the Lord.*
- Take some time this week and think about sharing your faith.
 - Not some abstract, theological concept but your own story of faith, how you have come to know Jesus Christ and how God helps you in your daily life. Share YOUR story

- Think about the difference faith makes in your life, how God motivates you to come to Church, to help others, to fulfill the obligations you have in every aspect of your life.
- I pray that you know our God is not distant, aloof or angry, that God wants each of us to know of the gentle grace and powerful love that come to us in Jesus Christ.
- It's what Isaiah is doing in our first reading:
 - He share with them an image of a tender God who comforts, who consoles, who seeks to be present in their suffering
 - Then he tells all of Israel and us: Go up on to a high mountain...cry out at the top of your voice... herald of good news!...Fear not to cry out and say... Here is your God!
- Think about how this God can help comfort and console others, especially those who are struggling, alone, afraid, or despairing.
- Share your story with them. So many of you have told me profound stories of the grace and presence of Christ in your life, even and especially as you have struggled, of the blessings received through our community, through your prayer, through your requests, through sisters and brothers in this community and the community around us.
- Think of your sharing your faith in the same gentle, simple way you share other good news. Invite your friends, your kids, your grandchildren, your parents, anyone and everyone you know could use the grace of a God who comes and walks with us.
- Share with them how your faith helps you, how you have been thinking of them, praying for them, not to control them but so that they might share what helps YOU.

- Not a guilt trip or anything forced (although we Catholics have been pretty good at that). Tell them that it's different than that now, that it's not about going through the motions or having all the answers. Tell them that some questions still remain.
- Tell them it's not about getting your act together and being perfect, or putting on the mask and façade so that no one will know. Tell them that faith is precisely about being imperfect, about having questions, about feeling overwhelmed but somehow also knowing that it's a little bit easier with God in the mix.
- That's one of the major points of our second reading. God's time is about God being patient with us, wanting to walk alongside us that we know Him better, that we love Him, that can be helped by Him
- *Prepare the way of the Lord.*
- Telling our story is much like the Incarnation itself.
 - God comes to us not in all of his glory, power, majesty and might, but as a baby, helpless, tiny, gentle, even frail.
 - God comes like that to walk along side of us, to assist us, guide us, strengthen us without bulldozing us.
 - Sharing our story, telling others about Jesus, especially those closest to us, is walking along side someone to allow God to help them, allow God to engage them.
 - Sharing our story is an invitation from God, through you. You need only pray for them and invite them on the journey. God will take care of the rest once you have prepared the way.
- God is speaking. We need only listen and then share OUR story.
Prepare the way of the Lord.