

2nd Sunday of Advent (C)
(Baruch 5:1-9 / Luke 3:1-6)
05.12.21

Flattening mountains and hills, filling in valleys

Dear brothers and sisters,

The Advent season is a twofold liturgical season. The first part is orientated toward the coming of Christ at the end of time. The second part, which begins on the 17th of December, is a memorial of the first coming of Jesus at Bethlehem, more than two thousand years ago. The first three weeks of the Advent Season are offered to us every year by the Church as a time of preparation for the end of time, when Christ will return to take us to live with Him in the community of the Trinity in a definitive way. His Kingdom will then be fully established.

On this second Sunday of Advent, we are guided by John the Baptist who teaches us how to prepare ourselves for the second coming of Christ. John the Baptist situates himself in the lineage of the prophets of the first covenant, especially Isaiah and Baruch, whom he quotes at some length. In today's gospel passage we heard John the Baptist say to us "Prepare a way for the Lord, make his paths straight. Every valley will be filled in, every mountain and hill will be laid low, winding ways will be strengthened and rough roads made smooth"... By these words, the prophet John the Baptist invites us to flatten the mountains and fill in the valleys in our lives so that we may be able to welcome the Lord not only when he will return at the end of time but already now as he comes unceasingly to visit us. How can we know that we shall be able to welcome Christ at the end of time? The only answer to that question is: if we become used to welcoming Him day after day in our lives already here and now.

Flattening mountains and hills, filling in valleys...This imagery is based on a custom of the ancient world. When a king was planning a journey, a highway had to be prepared for him. There were no ready-made roads for him to travel. Creating a suitable road involved filling in valleys and topping hills to make a thoroughfare for the king. The imagery suggests that we have to prepare ourselves here and now, for the Day of the Lord. In our lives, the mountains and hills are the idols which enslave us and hinder us from loving God and loving our neighbour. The valleys represent the pitfalls or temptations which hinder us from welcoming God's kingdom.

So, what are the life situations that may hinder us from progressing in our spiritual life? I propose to underline two among many others.

Perhaps one of the valleys in our lives that needs to be filled in is a lack of regular personal prayer. Does it not happen that some of us never take time to pray personally? Does it not happen that some of us stop praying for a long period in our lives? Does it not happen that we struggle to be faithful to our daily commitment to personal prayer? When we become aware of this negligence concerning our personal prayer life, the point is not just to feel guilty about it or to be ashamed of it beyond measure. It is to remedy the situations. Prayer is a relationship, a relationship with God. All relationships require a continual effort on our behalf to remain faithful to them. So, as soon as we become aware of a negligence in our prayer life, the way forward is

simply to return gently to prayer, and to do so again and again, with humility, courage and perseverance.

One of the mountains and hills which have to be flattened in our lives is perhaps the time we pass every day in front of our TV or computer screens, or on our mobile phone. These means of communication are precious gifts offered to us to help us communicate with others and increase our knowledge in an easy way. But these means of communication can also become means of isolation and become occasions of waste of time and energy. The time we waste on surfing the web could be a time used to love God, serve our neighbour and respect ourselves, which are the ways through which God's kingdom comes among us!

When the Lord will come at the end of time, he hopes to find us waiting for Him, serving our neighbour and respecting ourselves; not just diverting ourselves from the main goal of our lives which is to seek God's kingdom.

We will never be able to fill in the valleys or lower the impassable mountains that have become part of us by our own efforts alone. Obviously, we have to make some efforts, but we need also the help of God's grace. This is something we have to ask for in prayer.

Prayer is vital if we want to love God and our neighbour, if we want to be ready to welcome the Lord not only when He will come to us in glory at the end of time, but already today as He comes to visit us in the here and now. During this Advent season, let us take time to pray. Let us choose the means which will help us to return to a regular personal prayer life.