

During the week of Thanksgiving, I was able to sneak away for a couple of days to enjoy one of my new favorite hobbies, hiking and wilderness camping. A friend and I were hiking through the woods of Mississippi. The trails were very clear and well marked and we were having a pretty easy time hiking along a river, until the trail disappeared at the edge of cliff. It didn't take us long to figure out that the river had recently washed out a big tree and the land around it, including our trail. Since we didn't want to turn back just yet, we had to push through the woods until we met up with the rest of the trail. I couldn't help but think of this as I reflected on the message of the readings for this second Sunday of Advent: "In the desert prepare the way of the Lord! Make straight in the wasteland a highway for our God!"

Advent is a time of preparation, a time of hopeful anticipation that our God is coming to visit His people. And this coming of our God for which we are preparing is not just the celebration of His first coming as a baby born to Mary at Christmas. We are also preparing for the second coming when Christ will come in glory and transform this old creation into "new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells."

And how do we prepare for the coming of Christ? Our answer is found in the words of Isaiah:

In the desert prepare the way of the LORD!

Make straight in the wasteland a highway for our God!

Every valley shall be filled in,

every mountain and hill shall be made low;

the rugged land shall be made a plain,

the rough country, a broad valley.

In other words, we must clear a path in our lives. When we discovered our hiking trail had been washed out, we had to push forward, taking care that our gear would not get hung up in the branches, taking care that a thorny vine or, worse yet, a spider web would not end up in our faces. We had to clear a path.

In our spiritual lives, clearing a path means first of all turning away from sin. This was the message of John the Baptist. As he prepared the way of the Lord, he told the people to repent so that their sins would be forgiven. Our sins are the greatest obstacles in the path of the Lord. But God's mercy can overcome any sin. This is why the Lord has given us the sacrament of reconciliation, so that we can repent and receive His forgiveness, so that He can remove the boulders from the path. Advent is a great time for confession. And it's not hard to find a convenient time for confession - at our parish we have four different times each week; they are listed on the front of the bulletin. And next Tuesday, December 19th, we offer confession in the evening. If you haven't been to confession in a while, do not resist any longer the boundless mercy of God. Come and receive the forgiveness and healing that He offers you in this great sacrament. Let the path of the Lord be cleared of these obstacles!

But our sins are not the only obstacles in the path of the Lord. Our attachments to the things of this world, can also block that path. Often the easiest way to identify our worldly attachments is to ask ourselves: how do I spend my time? Am I consumed with a desire for

money or power? Do I spend too much time on things like television or internet or social media? And perhaps most importantly, do these things keep me from spending quality time with the Lord in daily prayer? Often these worldly attachments are not things that are evil in themselves, but they can become obstacles in the path of the Lord if they distract us from entering into a deep relationship with God.

This is the call for us during this holy season of Advent - to clear the path of the Lord, to remove all the obstacles that stand in between us and our God who is coming to save us. But it's important for us to realize whose path we are clearing. We clear the path not so that we can make our way to God who is waiting for us on some far away throne. We clear the path so that God can come to us. When we prepare the way of Lord, when we make straight His path, "then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed and all people shall see it together." When we clear the Lord's path, He will come rushing in to visit us, to save His people.

See how great is God's love for us! See how great His desire to visit His people! So great that He became man, like us in all things but sin! So great that He will come again in glory and majesty! Let us make good use of this Advent season. By God's Grace let us clear away the sins and distractions that keep us far from God. May we make straight the highway for our God so that He May come soon and visit His people.