

For Sunday, December 10, 2017

Preparing for an Arrival

Second Sunday of Advent

<http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/121017.cfm>

Isaiah 40:1-5, 9-11

2 Peter 3:8-14

Mark 1:1-8

Before I entered the monastery, I enjoyed hosting dinner parties at my house. I enjoyed planning the entire evening – from choosing the dinner and dessert menu, to selecting a good bottle of wine, to shopping, cooking and cleaning, and setting the table. I would [prepare topics for conversation](#) and even readied a [board game](#) if the mood felt right! By late afternoon, I had freshened up and the last minute food prep underway. As the appointed time drew nearer, I put the flowers in the vase, lit the pine-scented candles, and vacuumed the rug one last time! I would feel a nervous excitement. Then “ding dong” went the doorbell and the party was on!



The Advent season takes on this same anticipatory sense. We hear familiar plans mentioned in our readings today. The Gospel has, perhaps, the most familiar one: “Prepare the way of the Lord.” But for so many of us, we forget what preparations [John the Baptist](#) is talking about. Why is that? While there are probably many mitigating factors, perhaps the result is the same: [we’ve forgotten Whose anticipated arrival](#) is the [cause of all the merriment](#). Online sales and extended shopping mall hours, family decorating traditions, attending holiday parties, driving around town at night seeing houses elaborately lit up with various light arrangements, pictures with Santa Claus and coordinated family outfits – none of these are bad, and to an extent they do help us to prepare, but for whom?

This second Sunday of Advent, the readings describe a “voice [that] cries out” (cf Is 40: 4; Mk 1: 2). Do we recognize it? Are we listening for a voice in the first place? How can we hear the herald’s cry of “good news” if we are too consumed with holiday-ness?

For some, the “good news” might arrive when the holiday schedule is over! We’ve done the gift exchanges; we’ve had the awkward conversation with relatives we haven’t seen in five years. We’ve baked and cooked, driven and eaten. We’ve caroled and opened presents, and even went to the midnight opening of that movie. But after-holidays relief is not quite the “good news” that the readings are describing. Advent has a strong emphasis on waiting, on preparing, on “making straight”, on “preparing the way” for Someone’s arrival.

What is there to prepare for the Lord but the wasteland and valleys of our hearts! Would that it be that our hearts are prepared akin to a sumptuous dinner party. Just as we would try our best that the dishes and tableware are washed, the drink ware without spots, a clean table cloth and dinner napkins set out, the menu prepared in advance so we can be attentive to our guests, so too a similar attention to the details of our interior preparations—[our heart](#)—would make for a warm and hospitable welcome for our Divine Guest. Would

that we could make a conscious effort this Advent to remember who it is that we are eagerly awaiting and why we hope he'd come.

“Make your list” and “check it twice.” Your guest is less concerned if you've been naughty or nice, and more concerned with granting us the long hoped-for salvation (cf Ps 85). This is the comfort to whatever consumes our attention in life. Yes, the holidays can be about gift-giving and memory-making, but the season's deeper richness is found in the gift-nay, the Person—[that we receive into our heart](#); for some, maybe the first time. For others, the 1000th time this season. This is the guest who'd prefer an extended visit with you than a graceful exit from you.

Br. John Marmion Villa, M.Div

PRAYER

Holy Mary, Mother of God,
preserve in me the heart of a child,
pure and transparent as a spring.
Obtain for me a simple heart
that does not brood over sorrows;
a heart generous in giving itself,
quick to feel compassion;
a faithful, generous heart
that forgets no favor
and holds no grudge.
Give me a humble, gentle heart
loving without asking any return;
a great indomitable heart
that no ingratitude can close,
no indifference can tire;
a heart tortured by its desire
for the glory of Jesus Christ:
pierced by His love
with a wound that will heal
only in heaven.

— Leonce de Grandmaison

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