

Is 40:1-5, 9-11 2 Pt 3: 8-14 Mk 1:1-8

Our country, as well as many other countries, has had to face the sin of racism in our history. This is a time to be honest and take serious steps to change. Yet a change in society can only start with a change in each of us, especially in our hearts. That is what Pope Francis is calling us to do. That is what Advent is all about.

In the gospel today John the Baptist also calls for change in the people, a complete change of mind and heart called metanoia. He demands that the people embrace repentance for the forgiveness of sins. This is how they will prepare for the coming of the Messiah.

John comes out of the desert, just as Israel came out of the desert after leaving Egypt and wandering for 40 years. The prophets come out of the desert. The story of Jesus begins by coming out of the desert by the River Jordan, where Israel crossed into the Promised Land. The desert is known as the place for encounters between God and the people. It is also a place of retreat to go away from the world and enter into God's presence. The desert is the place where people begin a new way of life. It is also a place of hunger. People hunger for the Lord.

The desert today is the margins of society. That is where we find Jesus. The margins are where the poor and powerless live. It is where we also begin. The desert symbolizes our need to change, to confront our sinfulness and seek a way to be different, to follow the call of God in our lives. Things do not always have to be as they have

been in the past. We can make a new world. That is how we prepare for the coming of Jesus.

Mark writes for first century Palestinian Christians, who were afflicted by poverty, disease, and marginalization, much like so many people today in our world whose lives have been worsened by the effects of the pandemic. Many people today feel as if there is no hope, as if they are powerless. John promises something new. Things can be different. It is here in the desert, the margins of society, where the people must return to start again, anew, to repent. Things can be different but they must begin with each of us.

Advent is that time for us. It is a time of hopeful expectation, of preparing to receive the Lord, to see and recognize Jesus whenever he comes and however he comes. In order to be ready we must also clear from our lives whatever would not allow us to see Jesus, especially as he comes in those who are not like us, not of our race or ethnic group, the most needy, the sick, the stranger. We must clear out the thinking that we are superior to others, the judging others as being less because they are different from us. Advent tells us Jesus comes in all of these and more. We must prepare to see and receive him.

We must be the good news of Jesus for the world. In order to do that we must be renewed in mind and heart ourselves. What must change in you today? Advent tells us to be people of hope for others. We must first change our hearts, our attitudes and then our actions. Give hope that something new can happen.

This year, between the disastrous effects of the pandemic, where the poorest have again suffered the most we have seen much bad news. Jesus is Good News because he shows how in loving and serving others, especially the least, we can truly change the world. Jesus is the beginning of the mission to spread that good news to the world. We are the ones to continue that mission.

Where is the hope today? It is you and all around you! The Good News is born in those who take the mission of Jesus to others. Find that Good News by sharing it yourself. Make this Advent a new day for you. Look into your heart now and ask what needs to change this Advent. It will allow you to be ready to recognize Jesus as he comes and to be able to share him with others.

May the Virgin Mary who prepared for Jesus and shared him with the world by her faithful response to God's call, help us see how we can do the same.