

"Prepare the way of the Lord"

(Marc 1:1-8)

Gospel of Mark 1:1-8 AV: *The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God; As it is written in the prophets, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee. The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. John did baptize in the wilderness, and preach the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. And there went out unto him all the land of Judaea, and they of Jerusalem, and were all baptized of him in the river of Jordan, confessing their sins. And John was clothed with camel's hair, and with a girdle of a skin about his loins; and he did eat locusts and wild honey; And preached, saying, There cometh one mightier than I after me, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to stoop down and unloose. I indeed have baptized you with water: but he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost.*

We are in the midst of the feast of the Nativity of Christ, and on the eve of the Holy Theophany, the appearance of God to man.

We are at the beginning of a new era ushering the entrance of the Lord Jesus Christ in Human History. We are also starting a New Year... Thus, we are in the midst of many new events, in a state of renewal.

In today's Gospel passage we read the first paragraph of Marc, "The beginning of the Gospel of

Jesus Christ." The most important words of this passage are first, "The beginning of the Gospel," and second, the person of John the Baptist. He is the one who "prepared the way." Blessed are those feet who prepare the way for the Gospel. The truth of the Gospel (the Good News) and the person of John the Baptist make us meditate on two important matters:

The first one is a great challenge. Is it possible for the Christian to remain neutral to the words of Gospel, or should he/she volunteer to preach the Good News?

God desires to put in front of everyone someone "who prepares the way." The Apostle Paul declared that how can people believe if they did not hear and how can they hear if we do not preach to them. The Forerunner John the Baptist prepared the way of the Lord Jesus. His example in this New Year demands from us to act similarly, and not to be neutral. It demands that we too become evangelists.

Our love for the Gospel and for the Church must be incarnated in actions. "Freely you were give, freely you give." The Christian cannot remain indifferent towards the call of the Lord to be sent and towards the people who are thirsty to hear the Gospel truth. His love to Christ and his love to people are two incentives calling him to be an ambassador of Christ in the world. Each one of us is a forerunner of Christ and the Gospel in his work, environment, or wherever he was appointed to be by divine Providence. This is the salting of the earth. This is the purpose of our existence on earth and the most noble goal of our life. We are as the Baptist a voice crying, "Prepare the way of the Lord."

In the beginning of this year and with the Nativity of our Lord, the Church renews its promise to prepare the way to evangelism. What we heard today in the Gospel is not a story, but it is a call. The Church has started a new walk today for evangelism. Ought we not to share in this mission? The Christian who contemplates his faith is taken by the zeal of missionary spirit. Since he loves God and his fellow man, he cries with Paul, "Woe to me if do not preach."

The second more challenging question is: how can we be apostles of Christ and evangelists on the likeness of the Baptist? The words of John shouting "Prepare the way of the Lord" instill in us enthusiasm and liveliness. His living example along with his words is very necessary for us.

The Baptist has initiated in his days a spiritual revolution, a revolution against corruption and spiritual stagnation, and injustice. His revolution was calling for a recommitment and living according to faith. It is a revolution that binds faith and works together. That's why he added to his shout, "Prepare the way of the Lord" "make straight his paths."

The revolution of the Baptist had a purpose to clarify the notions of faith, beauty, and richness. Faith is life and work. Beauty is the face of God. True richness equals poverty in spirit for Christ. Being rich is having a mission.

The face of the Baptist-the evangelizer- is not the one loved by most of us. It is the scene of an ascetic monk, who does not live in palaces and does not rest in his stillness, and is not gratified by leisure! The face of

this evangelist may be harsh to us. He clothed himself with camel's hair, and fed himself with locust and wild honey. But we humbly confess that his poor appearance points to his deep faith and commitment to what he is preaching. Thus richness is carrying the treasure of the Divine Word and preaching it, knowing that beauty and pleasure is in touching people's thirsty hearts. Can the a selfish man know the hard labor of evangelism? Can this man call for a living a life of sacrifice? Evangelism always requires the signs of truthfulness of the evangelist. The one who testifies needs to be the example par excellence in order for his testimony to be true.

If we ask, do we have to be like the Baptist in his cloths and food in order to be Christian and evangelists? The answer is to ask a questions totally opposite to the former: is everything we eat and wear is important for our life and mission? The answer we give to this question is the one that is acceptable to God. In any case, the love of evangelism will unwittingly defines for us our food, cloths and drink.

The colors of the luxurious, uncaring and selfish world are not suitable for the one who is preaching the Gospel. Thus, whoever is rich must use his richness as a tool for evangelism and whoever lives in luxury, his freedom of necessity makes him more ready for evangelization. The Lord Jesus is everything and we serve him in our needs and abundance, and we wear for Him and eat for Him and live for Him, and through Him we move.

The call of the Baptist, "Prepare the way of the Lord" is the voice of the Church crying and flaming our hearts in Christmas and New Year, and at every

beginning. "Make straight his paths" destroys all earthly passion in us and makes our souls zealous for whatever is good and noble. The world is sanctified when it is a tool for evangelism. Otherwise it is base.