

Strengthen the hands that are feeble,
make firm the knees that are weak,
Say to those whose hearts are frightened:
Be strong, fear not! Here is your God....

Second Week of Advent: Dec. 9-15, 2007

Isaiah 35

The Second Week of Advent

In the **Second Sunday of Advent** the we hear **Isaiah** write of peace and prosperity that will come when the "root of Jesse" blossoms. "Then the wolf shall be a guest of the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; the calf and the young lion shall browse together, with a little child to guide them. **Matthew's Gospel** brings us the famous Advent reading of John the Baptist serving as a voice of one crying out in the desert, "Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths."

In the Americas, Wednesday is the **Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe**, with readings for that day. Thursday is the **Memorial of Saint Lucy**. Friday is the **Memorial of Saint John of the Cross, priest and doctor of the Church**.

We focus on the first readings from the Prophet **Isaiah** this week. With the Babylonian Captivity, the temple was destroyed, the leaders of the people were taken away to Babylon and a remnant was left behind. A life-threatening desert separated the people. In this context, Isaiah proclaims God's vindication of the people in exile. The desert will be reborn. A highway will bring their liberation. And the signs will be that there is healing and peace. "Comfort, give comfort to my people," says the Lord. The valleys will be filled in, the mountains leveled - every obstacle will be overcome - to build a highway for our God to come and save us. The people can hardly believe the good news. They are weak and weary of their captivity. Isaiah proclaims, "They that hope in the LORD will renew their strength, they will soar as with eagles' wings." The people have been at a distance from the Lord for some time and were not obeying the commandments. The Lord says, "I, the LORD, your God, teach you what is for your good, and lead you on the way you should go." The final first reading this week is a piece from the book of **Sirach** in which the prophet Elijah is praised. Elijah, who was destined to come again to restore order before the day of the Lord, is seen in the reading from **Matthew's Gospel** to be John the

Daily Prayer This Week

Finding intimacy with God in the midst of our busy lives begins with getting in touch with our own desires. Advent is a wonderful time to ask myself, "What am I looking for? What am I desiring? What longing can I recognize in my heart?" The answers to those questions will be our best guide for daily prayer. The readings this week offer some possible ways to talk with the Lord about our desires.

We can begin by trying to get in touch with a part of my heart that is divided, perhaps with a desert separating the two parts. For example, is there a disconnect between my primary commitments and the amount of time and attention that I give to them? Is there a distance between who I say I am and who I actually am? Do I experience something missing between what I believe and how I live those beliefs? We all have these contradictions and inconsistencies within us. These are the places into which we can let our Advent desiring grow. This week, we can imagine the prophet saying, "there will be a path between what is separate or divided or at a distance in your life!" "What is desert, barren, dry, life-less in you will come to life!" "You will find freedom and comfort, where you have been finding yourself in a captivity to pattern and routine, where you have felt weak and weary." "Learn from the Lord and learn real wisdom."

When one or more of these desires really strikes a chord in our hearts, Advent begins for us. Each morning this week, we can turn to our God, when we first wake up, while in the shower or getting dressed, and simply ask: "Come, Lord. Come into this place, into this embarrassing place of need in my life." We may be able to be specific and ask,

Baptist.

The gospels this week, taken from various evangelists, show Jesus as the fulfillment of the liberation promised. Jesus heals the paralytic. He tends to the lost sheep of his flock. He comforts us who labor and are burdened. Jesus teaches a true wisdom.

The **Third Sunday of Advent** repeats an Isaiah reading from earlier in the week, filled with promise, healing and a hope for our longing: "Then will the lame leap like a stag, then the tongue of the mute will sing.... They will meet with joy and gladness, sorrow and mourning will flee." In **Luke's Gospel** we read the story of the paralyzed man whose friends want him healed, so they lower him from the roof into the crowded room where Jesus is speaking. He causes a stir when he says, "Your sins are forgiven." Then he tells the man, "I say to you, rise, pick up your stretcher, and go home."

"Please, Lord, come and be with me and bring life and hope into my morning as I face this meeting." As we go to work or do laundry or shop, or head home from work, we might ask even more specifically for the grace to love - to take the liberating journey across the desert and let the Lord bring us home to a place of comfort, healing and peace.

Advent is about our coming to a felt sense of our need for a Savior and letting our Savior into our hearts to save us. Advent comes alive for us as we identify our desires and let them be expressed as longing and expectant hope. Into this space our Lord comes with good news, healing and a peace the world can't give. As we taste our desires and longing grow, we can give thanks each evening before we go to bed, to acknowledge we are being given a great grace of a growing intimacy with our God, right in the midst of our very busy days.