

THE DAWN FROM ON HIGH

Take-Home 2: A Voice Cries: Prepare (Isaiah 40:1-11)

WHAT WE FOUND

Isaiah 40 speaks into a darkness even deeper than last week's: Jerusalem destroyed, the people exiled to Babylon. And God's first word into it is tenderness: "Comfort, comfort my people, says your God." Then a voice commands a royal highway through the wilderness, and we read verse 3 word by word and found who the road is for: "the way of the LORD... a highway for our God." The herald's whole message is "Behold your God!" The comfort of Isaiah 40 is not a change of circumstances. It is a Person, arriving: with might (v. 10), and gathering lambs in his arms (v. 11), in the same breath.

Then we opened Mark 1:1-8 and did the arithmetic aloud. Mark begins his Gospel with a prophetic citation whose controlling line is our verse 3: John the Baptist is the voice, and the way being prepared is the way of Jesus. His camel's hair and leather girdle (Mark 1:6) closely evoke Elijah's haircloth garment and leather girdle (2 Kings 1:8), and Malachi 4:5 had promised Elijah before the great day of the LORD. The highway Isaiah built for the LORD himself, Mark lays down in front of Jesus of Nazareth. In his opening sentence, without a single argument, Mark has told us who Jesus is.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: St. Augustine

"John is the voice, but the Lord is the Word who was in the beginning." A voice sounds for a moment and fades; the Word remains. Every herald, Isaiah included, is a voice. There is only one Word.

Sermon 293, on the birth of John the Baptist

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: St. Bernard of Clairvaux

Bernard teaches, in substance, that the Lord has three comings: in flesh at Bethlehem, in glory at the end, and between them a hidden middle coming, in spirit and power, in which the one who keeps his word receives him within. Advent prepares us for all three at once.

Fifth Sermon for Advent (Liturgy of the Hours, First Week of Advent)

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: St. Gregory the Great

Gregory teaches, in substance, that pastoral care must be adapted to each soul, as a physician suits the medicine to the illness, so that the shepherd bends to the weak rather than driving them. The same signature is in our text: the God who comes with might spends the next verse gathering lambs in his arms. Strength that stoops is the signature of the God of Israel.

The Pastoral Rule, especially Book III

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

1. Clear the road: go to confession this Advent. If the parish has a penance service, it goes on the calendar now.
2. Be the voice once this week: one deliberate act or message of comfort to the person you thought of tonight. Speak tenderly.
3. Two candles now: keep the evening candle practice, adding this week's verse on the second night of each evening.

MEMORY VERSE

"A voice cries: 'In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.'" (Isaiah 40:3)

BEFORE NEXT SESSION

Read Isaiah 7:10-17 once, slowly. It is Gaudete week: the sealed guesses open. Bring your Bible.

Catechism references from this session: CCC 64, 523, 719.