

PREPARE THE WAY



“*Prepare the Way*”. This familiar Advent refrain wakes us up from our everyday complacency and evokes in us a much deeper interior challenge and invitation. As our preparations for Christmas get underway these early December days, thoughts often turn to plans for setting up home decorations, baking goodies, writing cards, creating gifts, singing carols, and finding ways to help those less fortunate.

What if ... all of these actions flowed from minds and hearts radically transformed in the Great Love and Divine Light of the Prince of Peace?

What if ...the coming of God in 2022 meant seeing and hearing the Divine compassion lifting up the wearied, poor and broken-hearted?

What if... you were that prophetic voice, authentic witness, bringing the Good News to life anew?

In days of old, **John the Baptizer**, an austere hermit, came forth from the desert of Judea and began to preach on the banks of the Jordan River. Awakened by his unique calling, John embraced being the humble forerunner, the prophet sent to prepare the way, mandated with the mission to announce that the day was drawing nearer. Prepare your hearts. Soften the divisions and break down the barriers, roll out the carpet for the expectant arrival of the King of Peace. John proclaims a way of justice and peace and love is coming upon the earth. The new WAY was going to be given in the person of Jesus, the Christ. John was chosen to bear witness and proclaim that the One who is coming was greater than he and “he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire” into a brand new way of seeing and being.



From his pulpit on the river banks, he called for repentance and baptized people in the river waters. John’s repentance, *metanoia*, meant having a radical change in one's thinking. It meant seeing the world in a completely different way and embracing a whole new set of values. He was the “*voice crying out in the wilderness: “Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.”*” John pointed to Jesus as the One who came to heal broken hearts, to give peace and to lead us further into the truth. We can only imagine John’s surprise when Jesus just “showed up” in the crowd by the river one day and asked John to baptize him.

This image of our humbled and repentant **Pope Francis** alone in prayer by the shores of Lac Ste. Anne in Alberta is a striking prophetic, healing voice in our time. On July 26, it is estimated that 10,000 pilgrims gathered at or around the lake to witness his words and actions that day. Both Indigenous and Church elders challenge all of us to “Prepare



the Way” for God’s love and healing mercy to restore hearts through conversion and reconciliation. Pope Francis traveled to Canada on this “pilgrimage of penance” to apologize to Indigenous peoples for the abuses committed by the Catholic Church and its missionaries in our country’s notorious residential schools. When Pope Francis ‘showed up’ on our Canadian shores, the crowds mingled in sharing stories with gestures of welcoming and generosity, supporting the healing and hope long awaited.

How are **you** preparing the way for God’s coming? The challenge of repentance is to put on the mind and heart of Christ. It must begin with the truth: If there are old wounds and potholes in your heart, take courage, face the consequences of hardening the arteries and energies of loving, seek restoration and communion. If your mind is cluttered and disturbed by its righteous opinions, take courage, face the consequences of division and disharmony, seek wisdom and right relationship with all.



Advent challenges us to spend time in solitary prayer asking God to comfort, restore, and heal those bumps and bruises that life’s circumstances have caused. The new highway of world peace is being paved with good intentions, right actions for systemic justice and nonviolent communication. It is coming slowly but it is coming. It is for each one of us to play our part.

Rosemary O’Toole, CSJ

Photo of Pope Francis by Eric Gay/Associated Press, July 26, 2022.