



# Come and See!

January 13, 2019

## The Word...

“A voice cries out: In the desert prepare the way of the LORD!  
Make straight in the wasteland a highway for our God!  
Every valley shall be filled in, every mountain and hill shall be made low;  
the rugged land shall be made a plain, the rough country, a broad valley.  
Then the glory of the LORD shall be revealed,  
and all people shall see it together; for the mouth of the LORD has spoken...  
Like a shepherd he feeds his flock; in his arms he gathers the lambs,  
carrying them in his bosom, and leading the ewes with care.”  
*(from Is 40:1-5, 9-11)*

## Pondering the Word...

The Lectionary lists several options for today’s readings, but this one really spoke to me as I have spent the last day or two trying to clean out my office. Since it is a new year, there have been a lot of human interest news stories about downsizing and clearing clutter. There’s even a Netflix series right now about this very thing.

“*Make straight in the wasteland a highway for our God.*” While I don’t think my office would have earned the “wasteland” designation, it was getting awfully close! I know the clutter—in my physical space and in my mind and heart—gets in the way of my spiritual life. And I know that Jesus does some of his best work right smack dab in the middle of all the mess, but I am often too distracted to even notice.

Cleaning up and clearing out is hard work; it takes a conscious commitment. Fr. Richard Rohr, in a recent blog post, quotes the great Quaker author, Parker Palmer, as he reflects on getting older and scaling back:

I no longer ask, “What do I want to let go of, and what do I want to *hang on to*?” Instead I ask, “What do I want to let go of, and what do I want to *give myself to*?” The desire to “hang on” comes from a sense of scarcity and fear. The desire to “give myself” comes from a sense of abundance and generosity.

To what do you want to give yourself in 2019?

## Living the Word...

I love this approach: What, and to whom or what, do I want to give of myself? It’s much more positive and life-giving than hanging on. The New Year always provides a good starting point for changes, but the awareness to really affect those changes is a day-by-day commitment.

If you haven’t adopted the examen as part of your daily prayer, I encourage you to give it a try. Looking back *nonjudgmentally* on your day helps you identify times you were graced with success in your commitment to give, but also to consider those people and things that challenge you. The prayer also suggests you think ahead to the next day and ask for help for those situations that may test you. A midday 1-minute check-up each day also provides encouragement and grace. Give yourself to this affirming and life-giving prayer and see how it can make a difference for you. ([www.ignatianspirituality.com/ignatian-prayer/the-examen](http://www.ignatianspirituality.com/ignatian-prayer/the-examen))

Personal Reflections and Ideas: \_\_\_\_\_

**Jan 14:** *"Repent, and believe in the Gospel."* (Mk 1:14-20)

I use several Scripture translations to see how different scholars interpret what is considered to be the original text. The word "repent" is translated as "turn back" or "change your hearts;" the Greek word is *"metanoieite."* I think these interpretations lead us to a different place than does the idea of repentance. While saying we are sorry for the things we do wrong or overlook is important, if we don't allow the grace of mercy to change what leads us to sin in the first place, our repentance becomes rote prayer. If our so-called "transactional sin" is gossiping, we will continue to commit that sin if we don't recognize the pride, shame, or envy that lies behind it. If we harbor bigoted thoughts, allowing those thoughts to influence our actions, and fail to recognize the fear that is the source, our sin remains. Jesus tells us, turn back to God; change what you hold deeply in your hearts by having faith in the good tidings his promise of salvation brings. Spend some time in prayer today reflecting on what causes you to act in sinful ways. Ask Jesus to help you bring about a true change of heart.

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**Jan 15:** *"For it was fitting that he...should make the leader to their salvation perfect through suffering."* (Heb 2:5-12)

The author of the letter to the Hebrews extols God's wisdom in becoming one of us in order to lead us. He tells us since Jesus was tested through suffering he is able to help us when we are tested. But that only works if we accept Jesus as one of us. And if we accept Jesus in his full humanity, we also have to accept that the life he led is within our reach as well. It's easy to keep Jesus at arm's length when we call him God. Our greatest comfort *and* our greatest challenge, however, come when we are willing to call him Brother.

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**Jan 16:** *"Because he was tested through what he suffered, he is able to help those who are being tested."* (Heb 2:14-18)

When I reflect on Jesus' suffering, I tend to focus more on the physical and mental aspects of his suffering: sweating blood at Gethsemane, the indignity of his trial, the arduous and painful trek to Calvary, and of course, the searing pain of crucifixion. I don't often take the time to consider his spiritual suffering: his asking God to take away the cup he is to drink, his surrender to God's will, the cry of abandonment from the cross. Jesus struggled with God. His spirit was defeated. While I don't think he ever doubted God, he surely felt God had left him to die alone. Remember this when you find yourself struggling spiritually. Jesus has been there.

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**Jan 17:** *"If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts."* (Ps 95)

The way this verse is written, it seems to say that sometimes, when we hear God's voice, we turn away. We don't want to listen to what God has to say for fear it will have something to do with giving things up or doing more than we think we can. I'm sure that does happen, but I wonder...how often do I fail to even hear God's voice because my heart is already so hard? These days, the constant stream of disturbing news can toughen even the most gentle of hearts. It's particularly important that we make a conscious effort to sit quietly and listen. Don't be fearful to hear God's voice—what God has to say will always be for our good.

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**Jan 18:** *"Therefore, let us strive to enter into (his) rest."* (Heb 4:1-5, 11)

Do you know that feeling you get when you've been working really hard—maybe you did this over the holidays or studying for exams—and finally, your work is done. You have the opportunity to get into bed and just rest. While I am thankful each night for a warm, comfortable place to sleep, there is something special about the rest I get after an assignment or event is done. The author of the Letter to the Hebrews seems to understand this. The reward is so much sweeter when we strive for it. Keeping God's commands can be hard work, but we know when we finally earn our rest, all striving will cease. *"Our hearts are restless, Lord, until they rest in you."* We pray you will grant us the grace and the strength to keep striving, and your mercy when we fall short.

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**Jan 19:** *"Let the words of my mouth and the thought of my heart find favor before you."* (Ps 19)

This is a good follow-up to Monday's reflection about changing our hearts. While I can slip up, the words of my mouth usually don't reflect the negative thoughts I sometimes harbor in my heart. These days, it seems like people feel much freer to express the anger and hatred they feel and that is so very sad. Our goal is to make sure that when God looks at us, he hears reflected in our words the real, true love and compassion we hold in our hearts. Pray that your heart and your words find favor with God.