

PREPARED FOR THE COMING OF THE LORD

According to the Law of Moses, Israelite farmers who lost their land and were forced into servitude could regain their land every fifty years (see Lev 25:10). In 586 BC, Israel lost its land and was forced into exile. Fifty years later, after the edict of Cyrus (538 BC), they could return and regain their land. In today's first reading Isaiah - filled with joy - announces this year of grace. What seemed impossible is going to become possible: the promised land shall flourish again. "The shall rebuild the ancient ruins, raise up the desolations of old, renew the ruined cities, places devastated for generations" (Is 61:4).

In today's Gospel, John the Baptist also awakened the messianic hopes of a nation living under the heavy yoke of the Roman empire. Like Moses, he led the people out into the desert, like Joshua baptizing them in the waters of the Jordan, and like the prophets he called them to conversion. The nation had not experienced such a thing for almost 500 years. With the death of the last three prophets, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi - God 'went silent'. But one of them included in his writings the promise about Elijah to precede the coming of the Lord's day (Malachi 3:23).

Finally, in the second reading, Paul prepares the Thessalonians for the second coming of Christ. This preparation includes specific advice - there are a total of eight of them. The first three relate to the lifestyle that flows from faith: constant joy, prayer without ceasing, and thanksgiving in every life situation. The next three are connected with the Holy Spirit: the prohibition of "extinguishing" the Holy Spirit, the prohibition of disregarding the prophecy and the call to discernment. Finally, the last two evoke the image of biblical Job. Like him (see Job 1: 1), the Thessalonians should hold on to good and avoid evil. These counsel end with the apostle praying that God would complete their sanctity and keep them without blemish at the coming of Christ.

For the motto of his mission, John chose a quote from Isaiah, which we heard on the previous Sunday of Advent. He did not see himself in any of the roles 'assigned' to him by the crowds, whether the messiah or Elijah or the prophet. He was the "voice" that preceded the Word. He called the people into the desert, and left the rest to the Incarnate Word. Towards His coming John is directing everyone's attention. "Among you is one whom you do not know" (John 1:26).

How important is to know the One who comes after the Baptist has been revealed by the Savior Himself. "This is eternal life, that all may know You, the only true God and the One whom You sent - JESUS CHRIST" (John 17: 3).

The Liturgy of the Word prepares the world for the coming of the Lord. Some need the first one proclaimed by John, others await the second one, of which Paul wrote. Among us is the resurrected Lord, anointed with the Spirit, dressed in the garments of salvation and the mantle of justice (Isaiah 61: 1, 10). Many, however, do not know Him, many have turned away from Him, and many have become so accustomed to sin that they can not imagine a life of holiness. It is for them that Isaiah proclaims the coming of the time of mercy, the possibility of reconstructing their ruined life in Jesus Christ. On the other hand, we who have already experienced this time of mercy, listen to Paul's advice. Thanking God for the grace of salvation, we ask Him to complete our holiness and keep us "without blemish at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." Amen.