

11. December 2023

## The Sacred Way

Isa 35:1-10

*"Let the desert and the dry lands be glad, let the wasteland rejoice and bloom; like the asphodel, let it burst into flower, let it rejoice and sing for joy. The glory of Lebanon is bestowed on it, the splendour of Carmel and Sharon; then they will see the glory of Yahweh, the splendour of our God. Strengthen all weary hands, steady all trembling knees and say to the faint-hearted, 'Be strong! Do not be afraid. Here is your God, vengeance is coming, divine retribution; he is coming to save you.' Then the eyes of the blind will be opened, the ears of the deaf unsealed, then the lame will leap like a deer and the tongue of the dumb sing for joy; for water will gush in the desert and streams in the wastelands, the parched ground will become a marsh and the thirsty land springs of water; the lairs where the jackals used to live will become plots of reed and papyrus. And through it will run a road for them and a highway which will be called the Sacred Way; the unclean will not be allowed to use it; He will be the one to use this road, the fool will not stray along it. No lion will be there, no ferocious beast set foot on it, nothing of the sort be found; it will be used by the redeemed. For those whom Yahweh has ransomed will return, they will come to Zion shouting for joy, their heads crowned with joy unending; rejoicing and gladness will escort them and sorrow and sighing will take flight."*

Once again the Lord gives us wonderful words of comfort - He never abandons His people! It is as if today the Lord is crying out to us, "Listen carefully and let these words penetrate deeply into you! You must lift up your heads, for salvation is at hand." God speaks to His people and wants to lift them up again. One would like to exclaim to the people of Israel and to all the nations of the earth: "Open your ears and listen! Salvation is for all peoples! What God announced through the Prophet Isaiah has already been fulfilled. You only have to recognize it. Salvation is here, very close to you. God stands at the door of your heart and declares His love to you. Who can remain indifferent to the love of the Divine Child? O peoples, where are you going? He who can answer your longings is here and will return at the End of Time to bring everything to fullness. Look to Jesus and you will find everything!"

We Christians know that in the Coming of Jesus into the world the words of Isaiah were fulfilled. The glorious reality described to us in this reading - in which our hearts rejoice - is made palpable in the Gospel account of this day (Lk 5:17-26): *"Jesus heals the paralytic and They were all astounded and praised God and were filled with awe, saying, 'We have seen*

*strange things today*" (Lk 5:26).

But before working the visible miracle, the Lord had spoken the decisive words: "*Your sins are forgiven you*" (v. 20). Thus, in the light of this Gospel we can understand Isaiah's prophecy: God Himself comes and casts aside that which stands between Him and His children: "*He is coming to save you*".

And if we continue to listen to the reading in the light of the Gospel, we will see how clearly the promise is fulfilled: All weary hands are strengthened, and trembling knees are made firm.

Is this not the case in our way of following the Lord? When we become discouraged, when we allow ourselves to be too much overwhelmed by the darkness of the world, by the seemingly no way out and by the supposed victory of evil; when we are brought down by our own sins and weaknesses, do not His Word then lift us up? Do not the holy sacraments strengthen us? When we rise up and seek the Lord, do not the thick clouds dissipate and His light shines again? Is it not then that we regain our courage, so that we can also comfort others?

In His earthly life, Jesus actualized these signs foretold by Isaiah. And besides being a concrete reality, His miraculous healings can also be understood in a spiritual sense. It is not only the paralytic who, having been freed from his sins, can walk again. Indeed, every person who continues to cling to sin is paralysed, bound and lacking in freedom. Only when he meets the Lord will he be able to "*leap like a deer*".

And the promise that "*the eyes of the blind will be opened*" was not only literally fulfilled when Jesus restored sight to a particular person; He also frees us from our spiritual blindness. He opens our eyes, so that we begin to see the light in His light (cf. Ps 36:9). Likewise, the miracle that "*the ears of the deaf are opened*" can also be understood in the sense that the Lord heals the closedness of our inner ears. Thus, we become able to hear and understand His Word and His plans; we become disciples who listen attentively to their true Master and follow His instructions. Jesus opens our eyes and ears, so that we see and hear. He opens our lips, so that our mouth may proclaim His praise (Ps 51:15).

In the encounter with Jesus, everything is transformed. Springs of living water begin to gush forth. The Holy Spirit dissolves the rigid in us and guides us safely on the "Sacred Way", on the "Via Sacra". The darkness must retreat, because the pure and holy way has been opened for all. It is the Lord Himself who exclaims: "*I am the Way; I am Truth and Life.*" (Jn 14:6)

So let us lift up our heads in these difficult times and cling to the Words of God. The Advent Season is not only the remembrance and actualisation of the Coming of Jesus into this world; it is also a preparation for His glorious Return at the End of Time. We know very well what it is for us to do! In giving us the Gospel, the Lord has entrusted us with the greatest treasure. We are to lift it up and share it with the people, thus fulfilling our service in His vineyard. With our eyes and our hope fixed on God, we will also be able to get through the times we are living through. Courage! What can happen to us if we remain with the Lord? He will guide us safely along the "Via Sacra", even if everything around us collapses.