

Small Group Guide

Session 6: Advent

Preparing the Way: Transforming Our Hearts Through Peace

- At this time of year, it's easy to get caught up in the holiday madness. As much as we might like the lights, the carols, and the holiday cheer, there are times when we crave silence or solitude.
- We live in a world that is filled with noise, and it's not just about audible sounds. From multi-screening to multi-tasking, we fill our schedules and days with too much. Because we live in an incredibly busy world, it's easy to feel like life is a mess. And when we feel like life is a mess, our hearts are constantly filled with anxiety, worry, and frustration.
- Advent is a season where we can take a step back and prepare our hearts and minds for the birth of our Savior, Jesus Christ. When we do that, we open ourselves up to the peace that Jesus brings. This week, that's what we want to do as we look at the Gospel reading from the Second Sunday of Advent (today's reading from Mass). As we listen to the Gospel, don't just think about the words, but imagine yourself in the scene. To help us get there, let's close our eyes and sit in silence for a moment.

Read Mark 1:1-8.

Reflect and Discuss:

1. Was there anything that stood out to you from the reading?
2. What is the biggest mess you've ever had to clean up or situation you've had to fix? How did you feel when you first saw the disaster? How did it feel once you were done fixing it?

3. What do you think it means to prepare the way of the Lord and make straight His paths?
4. What do you think "making straight God's paths" has to do with finding peace?
 - Is your room a mess? Think about a time you've walked into a messy room. It might be hard to relax, hard to find anything, and you might feel uncomfortable. When our souls are a mess, we don't feel comfortable either. We can be consumed by anxiety, worry, guilt, and a whole bunch of other emotions. Why is that? It's because sin makes our souls messy.
 - In the Gospel, we're getting a look at John the Baptist. He was an interesting dude. As we see, he wore camel's hair and ate locusts. One might dismiss him based on his outward appearance; however, he had everything else in order. He knew that God was calling him to guide others towards repentance.
 - As Catholics, this is why the sacrament of confession is so important. Our Catechism says: *For those who receive the sacrament of Penance with contrite heart and religious disposition, reconciliation "is usually followed by peace and serenity of conscience with strong spiritual consolation."* (CCC 1468) Not only does receiving the sacrament bring us peace, but it strengthens our spiritual life.

Reflect and Discuss:

1. Why is it so hard to repent and turn away from sin?
2. What are some areas in your life that are messy right now that need to be cleaned up?
3. Where do you need peace in your life?

4. What would peace look like in your life?
5. What would it look like to have peace on earth?
6. What are different ways we can encourage one another to "make our paths straight"?
 - While we can encourage one another and work hard at growing in our faith, it's also important to recognize that we can't do this without God's grace and help. John the Baptist points this out when he says, "One mightier than I is coming after me." St. Paul shows us exactly what John means in his letters to the Corinthians.
 - 2 Corinthians 12:8-10 says, "Three times I begged the Lord about this, that it might leave me, but he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.' I will rather boast most gladly of my weaknesses, in order that the power of Christ may dwell with me. Therefore, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and constraints, for the sake of Christ; for when I am weak, then I am strong."
 - Notice how Paul says "I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and constraints." That sounds like a guy who is at peace, and that's because he knows that even when he is a mess, Christ can take care of the rest.
 - During this season of Advent, we can listen to John the Baptist and make straight paths in our hearts for the Lord to come in. While we don't have to be perfect, we have to continue to work at opening our hearts and allowing the Spirit to fill us with peace.
 - Our theme verse for this session is **Philippians 4:6-7**: "Have no anxiety at all, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, make your requests known to God. Then the

PEACE of God that surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus."

- Our challenge for this session is to use the Advent Challenges handout this month.

Close in prayer.