

**'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight'**  
(Mk 1:3).

These words are spoken to me. The Lord is coming and I must be ready to welcome him. Every day I pray, 'Come, Lord Jesus.' And he replies, 'Yes, I am coming soon' (see Rev. 22:17, 20). He is standing at the door and knocking. He asks to come in (see Rev. 3:20). I cannot leave him outside of my life.

The invitation to welcome the Lord came from John the Baptist. It was directed to the Jewish people of his time. They were asked to confess their sins and be converted, changing their lives. He was certain that the coming of the Messiah was about to happen. Would the people, who had been waiting for him for centuries, recognize him, listen to his words and follow him? John knew that to welcome him they had to get ready, hence his pressing invitation:

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These words are spoken to me because Jesus continues to come every day. Every day he knocks at my door and for me too, as for the Jews at the time of the Baptist, it is not always easy to recognize him. So, contrary to what was commonly expected, he presented himself as a humble carpenter from Nazareth, an unimportant village. Today he presents himself under the guise of a migrant, someone with no work, an employer, a schoolmate, relatives, even of people who don't always seem to shine with the face of the Lord, indeed where his face seems hidden. His subtle voice, which invites us to forgive, to give trust and friendship, to refuse to give in to choices against the Gospel, is often drowned out by other voices that incite us to hate, get our own back, become corrupt.

This is the basis for the metaphor of tortuous and impenetrable paths that recall the obstacles hindering God's coming into our everyday lives. It's almost pointless to list the meanness, the egoism, the sin that dwells in our hearts and makes us blind to his presence and deaf to his voice. Each one of us, if we are sincere, knows what are the personal barriers that get in the way of our meeting Jesus, our meeting his word, our meeting others, all people he has made to be identified with him. Hence the invitation in the Word of Life that today is spoken directly to me:

**'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.'**

I do this by straightening out that judgement which makes me condemn the other person, which makes me stop speaking to them, and I come, instead, to understand, to love and put myself at the other's service. I do it by straightening out that bad behaviour which makes me betray a friendship, makes me violent, makes me cheat the law of the land, and I come, instead, to be

converted into someone ready to put up even with injustice if it salvages a relationship, someone willing to pay in person the cost of encouraging fraternity in the area I live.

It is a hard and a strong word, the one we have this month. But it is also a liberating word, one that can change my life, open me up to meeting Jesus, so that he may come to live in me and it may be Jesus who acts and loves in me.

This word, if it is lived, can do even more. It can give birth to Jesus among us, in the Christian community, in our families, in the groups where we are active. John spoke it to the whole of the people. And God came 'and lived among us' (Jn 1:14), in the midst of his people.

For this reason we want, helping one another, to straighten out the paths of our relationships, getting rid of any kind of distortion there may be between us, living the mercy we are invited to have. Like this, together we will become the home, the family that is capable of welcoming God.

It will be Christmas. Jesus will find an open path and will be able to stay in our midst.

*Fabio Ciardi*