

Discovering our call in the wilderness

*In the wilderness, prepare the way of the Lord*

## THE WILDERNESS AS A PLACE OF PREPARATION

The Second Sunday of Advent is devoted to John the Baptist. In the Gospel of St Luke, John the Baptist, the Virgin Mary, and Jesus are exemplars. That is, we are like them. Like them, our struggle to discover and express ourselves is like a journey through a wilderness; a prayerful journey, which, however difficult, is one which is accompanied by God, and which ends with fulfillment and joy.

The Hebrew of the text in Isaiah says (not a futile voice crying in the wilderness, but rather this:) "A voice crying: In the wilderness PREPARE the way of the Lord..." That is, when and where (we prayerfully believe that) God sends us, we are not alone, nor futile. Rather, God accompanies us and provides for us on that journey.

## A HIGHWAY IN THE WILDERNESS

The "wilderness" in our reading (as with the "chaos" in Gen 1:1) refers to the creation. It does not signify destruction or desolation, but rather, something creative, or full of energy.

In Isaiah, "highway" means the good highway system in Babylon, which the Jews knew when they were in exile there. The return of the Jews from Babylon to Jerusalem would involve a trip across the desert. So Isaiah described the highway across the desert to return home.

## A HIGHWAY IN THE WILDERNESS -- HANDEL

Handel knew how God could produce triumph through a wilderness journey. Handel's popularity collapsed in 1728, when he was forty-three years old. For nine years, he struggled to regain his public, in vain; and then suffered a stroke. At 52 years of age, the doctors told him he would live out his life as an invalid. So Handel's life was in chaos, and he was deeply in debt. At this very despairing moment in the summer of 1741 at a convent, he mysteriously recovered his ability to play; and then received an invitation to write an oratorio for a charity concert in Dublin. Removing Handel's untouched supper one evening, his servant saw tears streaming down the composer's cheeks. The music on the table before him was the "Hallelujah Chorus." He completed the entire "Messiah" on September 14, only 23 days after he began. "I think," he said, "that God has visited me."

In the succeeding 200 years "Messiah" has been sung everywhere. The Messiah, the music born in Handel's time in a wilderness, and which Handel gave away, became a household word. God can produce triumph through a wilderness journey.

#### D. A VOICE CRYING

By means of God's highway, our personal wilderness is drawn into a God's sovereign purpose. Let us not reject the confusion and chaos of our individual wilderness, which is not destructive, but rather, a creative source of energy. Let us accept that wilderness as a gift, and explore that gift. As we pray for God's guidance, so, through the wilderness a highway emerges, which takes us to our destiny. Amen.

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