

LITURGY & LIFE

THE EMMAUS JOURNEY

Second Sunday of Advent

Cycle B

A Catholic Update Companion to the Sunday Readings

PREPARE THE WAY—MAKE STRAIGHT HIS PATHS

Receive God's comfort • Turn toward Christ • Remove what obstructs grace • Become a herald of good news

1: FOR THE HOMILIST/PCL OR OCIA CO-ORD.: CHRIST SPEAKS - WE LISTEN

Sunday Readings

Liturgical Color	Violet — Advent
First Reading	Isaiah 40:1–5, 9–11
Responsorial Psalm	Psalm 85:9–10, 11–12, 13–14
Second Reading	2 Peter 3:8–14
Gospel	Mark 1:1–8

The Heart of This Sunday's Gospel

PREPARE THE WAY OF THE LORD

Mark begins his Gospel not with Bethlehem, but in the wilderness. John the Baptist appears as the promised messenger, calling God's people to repentance and preparing them to meet the One who is coming. John does not draw attention to himself. His entire life points beyond himself to Jesus Christ. He announces that the coming One is mightier and that Christ will accomplish what John cannot: He will baptize with the Holy Spirit. Advent preparation is therefore more than decorating, shopping, or counting the days until Christmas. It is the conversion of the heart. Valleys of discouragement must be lifted. Mountains of pride must be lowered. Crooked habits must be straightened. Rough places of resentment, distraction, fear, and sin must be brought before God. The Lord is already drawing near. The question is whether we are preparing a clear path for Him.

The Liturgical Thread

Isaiah speaks God's tender word of comfort to a people who have suffered exile. Their captivity is ending, and the Lord Himself is coming to lead them home like a shepherd. Psalm 85 announces a world transformed by God's presence: kindness and truth meet, justice and peace embrace, and salvation draws near. Saint Peter reminds believers that God's apparent delay is not indifference. The Lord is patient because He desires repentance and salvation. Mark presents John the Baptist as the voice crying in the wilderness. The promised return of God begins with a call to conversion and culminates in the coming of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

THE MOVEMENT OF THE READINGS

God speaks comfort → A path is prepared → Repentance opens the heart → Christ comes with the Holy Spirit → The disciple becomes a herald of good news

Listening With the Heart

Listen

Read Mark 1:1–8 slowly. Notice the wilderness, the crowds, the water of the Jordan, John’s clothing, and his repeated attention to the One who is coming after him.

Reflect

What part of your life feels like a wilderness? What obstacle makes it difficult for Christ to enter more fully? Where do you need God’s comfort, forgiveness, or direction?

Pray

Speak honestly with Jesus about one crooked path, one rough place, or one burden that needs His healing. Ask the Holy Spirit for the courage to begin again.

Rest

Remain quietly with the promise: “Here is your God.” You do not prepare the way alone. The Lord who calls you to conversion also comes with mercy, strength, and grace.

Carry This Word

MARK 1:3

“Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths.”

2: FOR THE CATECHIST: THE CHURCH TEACHES - WE LEARN

Catechetical Focus

CONVERSION, BAPTISM, AND THE LIFELONG CALL OF THE DISCIPLE

Repentance is not merely feeling guilty. It is a grace-filled turning of mind, heart, and life toward the God who is drawing near. John's baptism was a sign of repentance and preparation; Christian Baptism is greater. Through water and the Holy Spirit, the baptized are united with Christ, freed from sin, reborn as children of God, incorporated into the Church, and given a share in Christ's mission. Advent therefore reveals the pattern of the whole Christian journey: God speaks comfort, the heart turns, Christ gives new life, and the disciple continually allows baptismal grace to reshape conduct, relationships, worship, and mission.

Catholic Update Resources

PRIMARY CATHOLIC UPDATE

C0607A | Baptism: Our Lifelong Call

This Update presents Baptism not as a completed ceremony left in the past, but as the beginning of a lifelong vocation. Through water and the Holy Spirit, Christ frees the baptized from sin, gives new birth, incorporates them into His Body, and entrusts them with a share in the Church's mission. It provides the sacramental center of this Sunday: John prepares the way, but Jesus gives the new life for which repentance prepares us. Catechumens can look toward Baptism at the Easter Vigil, while baptized candidates and sponsors are invited to rediscover the call already received.

SECONDARY CATHOLIC UPDATE

C0203A | Lenten Customs: Journey to Conversion

Although written around Lenten practice, this Update's enduring contribution is its presentation of conversion as a journey rather than a single decision. Prayer, repentance, self-examination, simplicity, and works of charity create room for grace to reshape the whole person. Read through the lens of Advent, it complements John the Baptist's summons to prepare the way: the disciple turns toward Christ repeatedly, removes what obstructs communion, and allows baptismal grace to become a visible pattern of life.

The Catechist's Companion

Key Teaching

God's call to repentance is an announcement of hope. Christ comes to baptize with the Holy Spirit, and the grace of Baptism becomes a lifelong journey of conversion, communion, and mission.

Session Aim

Help participants receive repentance as a hopeful response to God's nearness, distinguish John's baptism from Christian Baptism, understand Baptism as a lifelong call, and identify one concrete practice through which ongoing conversion prepares a straighter path for Christ.

Formation Objectives

- Explain the wilderness and highway imagery in Isaiah and Mark.
- Describe repentance as more than guilt or regret.
- Distinguish John's baptism of repentance from sacramental Baptism.
- Explain why God's patience creates time for conversion and salvation.
- Identify one concrete practice that allows baptismal grace to shape daily life.

Integrating This Week's Catholic Updates

C0607A establishes the sacramental horizon: the One announced by John does more than call for reform—Jesus baptizes with the Holy Spirit and begins a lifelong vocation of communion and mission. C0203A supplies the continuing response: conversion is a journey sustained by prayer, self-examination, repentance, simplicity, and charity. Together with the Sunday readings, the Updates form one movement: God speaks comfort, John calls for a prepared path, Christ gives new life in Baptism, and the disciple spends a lifetime allowing that grace to straighten the road.

Expand the Conversation

- Why does the Gospel begin in the wilderness?
- What is the difference between regret and repentance?
- Why do people sometimes resist acknowledging sin?
- How does repentance prepare rather than diminish human freedom?

Common Misunderstandings

- Repentance is not self-hatred. It is turning from what harms communion with God and neighbor.
- Guilt is not the goal. Healthy sorrow should lead toward mercy, conversion, restitution, and freedom.
- God's patience is not permission to postpone conversion indefinitely. It is mercy creating an opportunity to respond.
- John's baptism is not identical to Christian Baptism. John prepares people for Christ; sacramental Baptism unites the person with Christ and gives new life in the Holy Spirit.
- Conversion is not only for people entering the Church. Every disciple is called to continual conversion.

Church References

Catechism of the Catholic Church: 1427–1433; 535–537; 720; 1213–1284; 1987–2005. Scripture connections: Ezekiel 36:25–27; Matthew 3:1–12; Luke 3:1–18; John 3:1–8; Acts 2:37–39; Romans 6:3–11; Titus 3:4–7.

OCIA Connection

Catechumens are preparing to receive the Sacraments of Initiation. John's call gives language to their present journey: leave the old path, enter the waters, and prepare to receive the life Christ gives through the Holy Spirit. Baptized candidates are called to recognize that their Baptism remains a living source of identity, grace, and mission. Their journey toward full communion is not a repetition of Baptism, but a deepening of grace already received.

Catechist's Insight

PASTORAL CARE

Begin with Isaiah's words of comfort before emphasizing repentance. Some participants may associate religion primarily with shame, punishment, or rejection. The biblical sequence is important: God speaks tenderly, God comes to save, and therefore the heart can safely turn toward Him. Do not ask participants to disclose private sins publicly. Be attentive to addiction, trauma, family conflict, or serious moral wounds; conversion may require pastoral care, professional assistance, healthy boundaries, restitution, or sustained accompaniment.

Begin with Isaiah's words of comfort before emphasizing repentance. Some participants may associate religion primarily with shame, punishment, or rejection. The biblical sequence is important: God speaks tenderly, God comes to save, and therefore the heart can safely turn toward Him. Do not ask participants to name personal sins publicly. Invite honest private reflection and explain the role of the Sacrament of Reconciliation for baptized Catholics. Catechumens do not receive sacramental absolution before Baptism because Baptism itself forgives all sin.

3: FOR THE CANDIDATE/CATECHUMEN: THE DISCIPLE RESPONDS - WE LIVE

Living the Gospel This Week

- What part of my life most needs God's comfort?
- What habit has made the path of discipleship crooked or rough?
- Is pride keeping me from acknowledging a need to change?
- Have I confused God's patience with permission to postpone conversion?
- What relationship needs truth, forgiveness, or a healthier boundary?
- How does my baptismal identity shape my daily choices?

Choosing to Be an Intentional Disciple

WHAT IS CHRIST ASKING OF ME TODAY?

What is one obstacle I can begin removing so that Christ may enter more fully into my life?

Intentional discipleship does not attempt to rebuild the entire road in one day. Identify one real obstacle—resentment, dishonesty, prayerlessness, an unhealthy attachment, neglected responsibility, prejudice, isolation, or fear of seeking help—and take one grace-filled step.

Holy Habit

THE DAILY PATH-PREPARATION EXAMEN

At the end of each day, ask: Where did I recognize God's comfort? What made the path toward Christ clearer today? Where did pride, fear, distraction, or sin create an obstacle? Whom did I encourage or discourage? What is one path I should straighten tomorrow? Conclude: "Come, Lord Jesus. Prepare Your way in me."

Faith Into Practice

- Set aside ten minutes each day for quiet prayer.
- Make an honest examination of conscience.
- Receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation if you are a baptized Catholic properly disposed to do so.
- Ask forgiveness from someone you have harmed.
- Remove one recurring distraction from daily prayer.
- Seek pastoral or professional help for a serious obstacle.
- Encourage someone who is discouraged or spiritually distant.

Personal Reflection

Which valley needs to be lifted, which mountain lowered, which crooked path straightened, or which rough place made smooth within me? What would become possible if I allowed the Holy Spirit to begin that work?

4: FOR THE SPONSOR: THE CHURCH SENDS - WE WITNESS

Sponsor's Path of Accompaniment

Share Your Faith	Share about a time when Baptism—or a renewed awareness of your baptismal identity—called you to change direction. Explain what helped you recognize the need, what made the change difficult, and where you experienced grace. Speak as a fellow disciple whose conversion continues.
Walk Together	Begin with Isaiah's question of comfort: "Where do you most need God to speak tenderly?" Then ask: "What path might Christ be asking you to straighten?" Listen without forcing disclosure. Help the participant connect the Sunday Gospel with the lifelong call flowing from Baptism.
Pray Together	Read Isaiah 40:1–5 and Mark 1:2–8 slowly. Pray: "Lord Jesus, speak comfort to our hearts, straighten what has become crooked, renew the grace of Baptism, and prepare us to receive and follow Your Holy Spirit."
Experience the Church	Visit the baptismal font together. Discuss its placement, symbols, and role in parish life. Connect the font with C0607A's teaching that Baptism begins a lifelong call, and with the conversion practices emphasized in C0203A. Pray for those preparing for Baptism and for all baptized Christians who need renewal.
Continue the Journey	Each person chooses one baptismal practice and one conversion task before the next meeting—for example, daily prayer with the Sign of the Cross, an examination of conscience, reconciliation, simplicity, or a work of mercy. At the next conversation, share what was learned rather than judging success or failure.

Faith at Home

Create a simple household "Prepare the Way" practice. Place an Advent candle near a Bible. Each day, household members may write one word on a paper stone representing an obstacle—anger, hurry, fear, resentment, distraction, selfishness, or discouragement. Place the stones near the candle and pray: "Come, Lord Jesus. Make a straight path through our home and hearts." At the end of the week, choose one action that helps remove an obstacle and brings comfort or peace to another person.

Parish Life

Invite the parish to examine how it prepares a path for people seeking Christ. Are newcomers welcomed personally? Are catechumens and candidates known and supported? Is Reconciliation accessible? Are people carrying grief, poverty, disability, or isolation accompanied? Choose one practical action that makes the parish a clearer road toward Christ.

Go Forth This Week

Receive God's comfort, straighten one path, and become a voice of hope for someone waiting to hear good news.

Prayer for the Week

Lord Jesus Christ, You come to Your people with mercy and power. Speak comfort to the places in me that are wounded, discouraged, or afraid. Lift the valleys of despair, lower the mountains of pride, straighten the paths distorted by sin, and smooth the rough places created by resentment and fear. Give me the honesty to acknowledge what must change, the humility to seek forgiveness, and the courage to take one faithful step. Renew within me the grace of Baptism and make me attentive to the movement of Your Holy Spirit. Like John the Baptist, teach me to point beyond myself. Let my words announce hope, my choices prepare Your way, and my life become a clear path through which others may encounter You. Come, Lord Jesus. Prepare Your way in me, in my home, in my parish, and in the world. Amen.

Emmaus Insight

The path is prepared for Christ whenever God's comfort leads the heart to repentance and repentance becomes a life of hope.