

In the gospel, John the Baptist takes up Isaiah's Advent exhortation: "Prepare the way of the Lord." Still quoting, John urges us to clear away all the stumbling blocks that might make God's road difficult. John promises we'll see "the salvation of God."

Baruch puts human faces on "the salvation": His hope that God will bring back home to Jerusalem those deported and scattered long before by harsh conquerors in a bloody invasion of God's city.

If it had happened then, many of those who survived would have been elderly by the time of their return. Their descendants would come as strangers to a city they had never seen.

Modern photos and videos would have filled in images of scarred, emaciated, fragile men, women, and children in other lands liberated from conquest and captivity, many hardly able to walk.

Rough roads would undo them. With touching compassion, Baruch seats them on royal thrones borne aloft on others' shoulders. They are "God's salvation" in the flesh, welcomed with honor.

What Baruch couldn't know is that the One who would bring them was himself born into a human race exiled from Eden and ruled ever since by the conquering powers of sin and death.

He came as a slave among slaves (see Phil 2:7), visiting human beings of every era in all the places of our enslavement to sin, sickness, and death in order to carry us out with him.

And we don't make that pretty a picture either, scarred as we are by our own wrongdoing and others', stumbling as we do in Christ's new light after a long darkness that we had ceased to recognize as the shadow of death.

Whoever we are, however we are, wherever we come from, we can be "God's salvation," and be one day welcomed out of this world to our true home in the Kingdom.

+There was a man who called up the highway department to complain about the condition of the road in front of his house. He kept calling and calling, complaining about all the potholes and bumps, but the highway department never did anything.

Finally, though, the man had called so many times that the highway department said that they would do something about his road. But instead of coming in and repaving it, the highway department resolved his complaint another way.

They stuck up a sign that said: "Rough Road Ahead." To be a part of the "salvation" will mean a rough road ahead, as we have to do our bit to get through it.

+Imagine yourself driving down the road, lost in a daze of our thoughts until a rock hits the windshield or the truck in front loses its tire. All of a sudden, you are jarred to complete attention. You straighten up, and you take whatever corrective action is necessary. Our focus goes completely outward.

+Or you are meandering around – in cruise control, but way above the speed limit. It is then you see a flash of blue lights in your rearview mirror. You slam the breaks as your eyes are riveted on your speedometer and then to your mirror. Or if you are me, you grab for the collar! Every nerve in your body is wired for action. You are completely alert.

In a sense, that is what John the Baptist brought to the scene: Wake up! Be ready! Level your life. Prepare the way, iron out the roughness – like foul language. Heard a lot of that by walking down side walk – not much a welcome for Christ to follow. You can clean it up by offering a prayer when you do slip.

Fill in the potholes of apathy or indifference. +I often help hearing kids confessions at our schools. Most are well versed and given a list of what the hit upon. A number of them will tell me, “I missed Mass the past two Sundays.”

I asked if they drove themselves to Mass? And they are like, “No! I am only in fifth grade!” I would then say, “How do you get to church?” “My parents” was the reply. I said, “That sin is on them not you.”

Be an example and level off the bumpy places of our character; there we smooth out the exaggerations and presumption, so our own eyes can see the way to the salvation of God.

To see we have to be clean from within. What thoughts come to you about other people? Want to level that out? Pretend everyone can read your thoughts.

When the Church invites us to conversion, as our response to the Baptist cry, she does not refer to a routine house cleaning. We are not to settle. As our former Bishop was found of saying, “Good ain’t good enough!”

It is a question of our becoming temples of God’s beauty, generosity, and truth. Here is our vocation, our response to the love affair for which we have been created from the genesis of the world.

But to do so, we first must listen for his voice. The Word came to the desert. The encounter with God does not happen in the noise of our daily lives, but in the quiet of them.

But it is not supernatural, either. As one put it, “It is in the concrete history, in the tapestry of joyful and sad events, in the fragmented projects of everyday life, where God is revealed.”

The call to conversion is not heard first in society, with all its noise, but in an individual’s life, in the freedom and calm that every person carries within. Our nearest inhospitable desert is ourselves. Upon hearing that voice, it is then we must cry out.

St. Luke describes John as “a voice of one crying out in the desert.” We don’t have to save the world in general. We only asked to be that voice, to give ourselves in a meaningful way, to one person in particular. That’s enough! One person at a time.

When we do that (in a sense) we become like John the Baptist, “A voice of ONE” crying out in the desert, preparing the way of the Lord to come once again into our darkened world!