



a Kendall Hunt Company

## Second Sunday of Advent, Year B, Catechist - RCLB Lectionary



### Catechist Background and Preparation

To prepare for this session, read all the readings.

Isaiah 40:1-5, 9-11

Psalm 85:9-10, 11-12, 13-14

2 Peter 3:8-14

Mark 1:1-8

Spend a few minutes reflecting on what these readings mean for you today. Is there a particular reading that appeals to you? Is there a word or image that engages you?

RCL Benziger

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Read the following **Word in Liturgy** and **Catholic Doctrine** sections. Read the Word in Liturgy and Catholic Doctrine sections. These give you background on what you will be doing this session. Read over the session outline and make it your own. Check to see what materials you will need.

### The Word In Liturgy

On the Second Sunday of Advent the emphasis begins to shift from the Lord's final coming in glory to his coming in human flesh. Each year on this Sunday, the gospel reading has John the Baptizer as its central figure. John's preaching was decidedly eschatological in tenor, as the gospels show, yet the liturgy uses him in a way that draws attention also to his role as the precursor of the birth of the Messiah.



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Mark describes John's clothing and food in a way reminiscent of Elijah, whose return it was—popularly thought would usher in the messianic era. Mark makes reference to the Book of Isaiah, but his quote actually combines several texts (Exodus 23:20, Malachi 3:1, Isaiah 40:3) which refer to the exodus, the exile, and the return. This is Mark's way of indicating that Jesus is the fulfillment of all of these messianic foreshadowings. In Mark's description of John's ministry, he highlights the fact that the people confessed their sins in response to the Baptist's call to repentance. The imagery of making the "way of the Lord" ready, of clearing a straight path, comes from Isaiah 40. The notion of preparing the Lord's "way" carried with it connotations of a particular decision that a disciple must make, a decision involving moral values and a specific course of action. The penitential motif that is so strong in the Advent liturgies is connected to this realization that in order to be prepared for the coming of the Lord, one must experience conversion, confession of sins, and true repentance by following the Lord's "way."

Deutero-Isaiah (chaps. 40–55) was written at the time of the Exile, when Israel's trust in the Lord was being severely tested. Using the imagery of the Exodus, the prophet paints a glorious picture of God's intervention to save his people from their slavery. This rescue is even more dramatic and decisive than the deliverance from Egypt, with miracles of nature ("every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low") that surpass the parting of the Red Sea's waters. But these miracles of nature pale before the spiritual reality that the prophet proclaims: Jerusalem's guilt is expiated, her service is at an end (v. 2). In the restoration of the people, "the glory of the Lord" is revealed (v. 5) and all people are able to see how Israel's God saves her from her sins.

## **Catholic Doctrine**

### ***Confession of Sins***

This Church season is pregnant with anticipation of a global healing. Advent points us to our redemption in Christ, whose birth and incarnation we prepare to celebrate and whose coming again in glory we anticipate. That the gift of redemption goes hand in hand with our acknowledgment of sin is a worthy theme of these Advent days. These two recurring themes—redemption and confession of sin—forcefully proclaim the healing that humanity may find in God's outreach to this wounded world. Just as John the Baptist points to Christ, the confession of our sins points to the healing mercy of a forgiving God.



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The disclosure, or confession, of sins, even from a purely human point of view, enables a person to move forward in life with a certain freedom, the freedom that comes from admitting that one has failed oneself and others. Moreover, from the perspective of faith, the confession of sin is fundamentally a confession or proclamation of our trust in God's saving love. Admitting our faults and sinfulness, we accept our responsibility. In doing so, we open ourselves to the divine and to communion with the household of the faithful, so that we may discover a new future along the paths of right (CCC 1455).

Confessing sin in order to be free of its binding weight and pursue God is certainly an appropriate Advent theme. John the Baptist stands forth as a beacon, calling each believer to the admission that we are not perfect and that we need God and God's grace in a radical way, reorienting our lives. Confessing sin can thus be seen as centering ourselves and our lives in God. Turning from sin and embracing God is nothing less than conversion and requires a truthful self-examination. We believe that the Word of God and the Spirit probe our hearts and cast a powerful light on the unhealthy, sinful side of ourselves, prompting us to this conversion.



The Council of Trent, in its teaching on confession of sins, followed St. Jerome, and used the image of a doctor of medicine who cannot help the patient because the sick person is too ashamed to show the physician the wound. Without this exposure of the wound, the doctor cannot apply the proper healing medicine. God acts as a physician to probe our hearts and by the inner voice of conscience reveals to us the first steps in our spiritual health. Catholic tradition has always held that an essential element of the sacrament of Reconciliation is the confession of sin by the penitent to the priest. In this way, a penitent is opened to the healing of God's grace (CCC 1456).

The Church proclaims in prayer: "Father of mercies and God of consolation, you do not wish the sinner to die but to be converted and live. Come to the aid of your people, that they may turn from their sins and live for you alone. May we be attentive to your word, confess our sins, receive your forgiveness, and be always grateful for your loving kindness. Help us to live the truth in love and grow into the fullness of Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns for ever and ever" (RPen 100).