

2nd Sunday of Advent

The Bible says “the Lord doesn’t want us to die in sin and perish eternally. So He is going to be patient with us that we can repent and return to Him. That is why we have the Message and example of John the Baptist. He is an example of somebody steadfast and dedicated to Repentance!

Signs and warnings- especially cancer warning in blood

Few years ago, for thanksgiving I went up to Wisconsin to spend some time with ten of my conferrers from my religious order working in different parts of the country. I drove up on Sunday and came down on Thursday. As I was driving down, a warning light appeared on the dash board telling me a message. It said maintenance required. Since I knew what it meant, I took my car to the shop and changed my engine oil. Every five thousand miles, I have to change my engine oil. Otherwise my car will not be functioning at optimum efficiency. There are signs and warnings in every aspect of our life. Whether you are driving, operating a machine, even with your physical and spiritual health there are signs and warnings. Cancer patients always look for the signs in their blood work. These signs and warnings are given so that we can prepare ourselves for what is about to happen.

In the wilderness of Judea John the Baptist gave a warning to the people of God, "Prepare the way for the Lord". He said Prepare the way, get ready, get your hearts ready, get your lives ready, and get your homes ready! Gospel, Good news, glad tidings demand one condition- Repentance!

Repent and return to the Lord – the priorities set by John: John recommended a baptism of repentance in the river Jordan to the Jews who were familiar with ritual and symbolic washings (Lev.11-15). The Jews insisted that when a male Gentile became a Jew, he had to do three things: i) accept circumcision as the mark of the covenant people; ii) offer

sacrifice because he stood in need of atonement, and iii) undergo baptism by immersion in water, which symbolized his cleansing from all pollution. The most amazing thing about John's baptism was that he, a Jew, was asking fellow-Jews to submit to that which only a Gentile was supposed to need. John was convinced of the truth that even the chosen people needed true repentance and renewal of life to receive their long-awaited messiah. The baptism of a Gentile was accompanied by a confession made to three different people as a sign of repentance for sin.

A young man complained that John is from the Old Testament; he is crazy and a mad a man of fire and brim storm. In the New Testament we have Jesus; He is kind compassionate, merciful- He doesn't say any of these things. But Jesus also said the same thing! "The time has come; the Kingdom of God is at hand, repent and believe. Gospel, Good news, glad tidings demand one condition- Repentance!"

Repentance in the Bible means:

1. Self-emptying!

In the Zen tradition of the Far East there is a story about a professor who went to visit the great master Nan-In one day. "Master," he said, "teach me what I need to know to have a happy life. I have studied the sacred scriptures, I have visited the greatest teachers in the land, but I have not found the answer. Please teach me the way." At this point Nan-In served tea to his guest. He poured his visitor's cup full and then kept on pouring and pouring so that the tea began to run over the rim of the cup and across the table, and still he poured, until tea was cascading upon the floor. The professor watched this until he could not longer restrain himself. "It's overfull! Stop! No more will go in!" he cried out. "Like this cup", Nan-in said, "you are full of your own opinions and speculations. How can I show you the way unless you first empty your cup?" Let us empty our hearts of all the unnecessary and harmful stuff during these Advent weeks, clean it with tears of repentance and confession of sins, allow it to be filled with God and keep Him the center of our lives during Christmas and every day of the New Year.

2. Repentance means repairing the inside; not just the outside- bathing, showering, putting on makeup doesn't make us great! **Why don't you fix the clock's inner parts?"** A man once owned a large and expensive clock crafted in Switzerland. He kept the clock in a window, where it was seen by passersby who set their watches by it. But something was wrong with the clock. Its hands habitually showed the wrong time. So the man spent considerable energy every day in turning the clock's hands to the right positions. This went on for several years, which kept the owner weary. One day someone suggested, "Instead of wasting your energy in correcting the hands, why don't you fix the clock's inner parts?" "What a tremendous idea!" the owner exclaimed in astonishment and delight. "I never thought of that!" [Vernon Howard. *Inspire Yourself* (Grants Pass, OR: Four Star Books, Inc., 1975).] God did not intend to make a few cosmetic changes by sending Christ into the world. God intended nothing less than to change the whole dynamic of human character. That's why each Advent we encounter this strange character, John the Baptist, with his call to repentance.

The baptism of a Gentile was accompanied by a confession made to three different people as a sign of repentance for sin. (i) A man must make confession to himself because the first step in repentance is to admit his sin to himself. (ii) He must make confession to those whom he has wronged. This involves humiliation and is a test of real repentance since there can be no forgiveness without humiliation. (iii) He must make confession to God because it is when a man says, "I have sinned," that God gets the chance to say, "I forgive."

3. Repentance also means stop doing what you are doing and returning!
ILLUSTRATION: Imagine that you are driving with your wife in your car, she tells you to turn right at the next intersection and by mistake, you turn left. When you realize what you've done, you say to your wife "I'm sorry honey, I went the wrong way." But if that's all you do, it isn't enough. Saying sorry doesn't get you where you need to be; it isn't even stopping you from going further away. To get

where we need to be, you need to stop the car, turn it around and go back on to the correct road that she told you to take in the first place. That is fruit in keeping with repentance. (Steve Gladwell on Sermoncentral.com)

John's message calls us also to confront and confess our sins; to turn away from them in sincere repentance; to receive God's forgiveness; and most importantly, to look to Jesus. Do we need to receive God's forgiveness? There are basically two reasons why we fail to receive forgiveness. The first is that we fail to repent, and the second is that we fail to forgive. Jesus was very explicit about this second failure in Matthew 6:14-15. He says, "For if you forgive men their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions." Is there someone we need to forgive today? Let us not allow what others have done destroy our life. We can't be forgiven unless we forgive. Let us let go of that bitterness and allow God to work healing in our life. Perhaps we need to draw closer to Him. Like the prodigal son's father, God will run to meet us. He will throw His arms around us and He will forgive us and restore us. He will receive us as His sons and daughters. Let us draw close to Him today, and He will draw close to us.

We need to make use of Advent as a season of reflection and preparation. We are invited by the Church to prepare for Christmas. Christmas is the time for reflection and personal renewal in preparation for the coming of Jesus into our lives. Through his letter today, St. Peter reminds us, on the one hand, of God's great desire to come into our lives and, on the other, of our need to be prepared for that event when it happens. We want God's help and comfort, but we are not always prepared to change our ways to enhance genuine conversion. For God to come to us, we also need to go to him. We need to let every day become Christmas and the "Day of the Lord" for each one of us.

Repentance is a U-turn in the middle of life's road. Sorrow PLUS Sincerity. That's what we see in the example of John.

John the Baptizer could never be accused of dabbling in repentance. Anyone watching John live day after day in a hot, arid desert, wearing camel-hair shirts and eating grasshoppers (Mk 1:6), would conclude that John was committed to repentance.

Anyone watching Jesus stretch out His hands to be nailed to the cross and then hang in crucified, excruciating agony would have to conclude that Jesus was committed to the forgiveness of sins. Look at a crucifix for a minute, and you can't come to any other conclusion but that Jesus was serious when He called us to repent and reform our lives (Mk 1:15).

Do we merely dabble in repentance, or will we make a commitment to repent? Will our Advent Confession reflect our commitment to "make every effort to be found without stain or defilement" in utter holiness? (2 Pt 3:14) Jesus wants "all to come to repentance" (2 Pt 3:9). "Commit to the Lord your way" (Ps 37:5).