

Homily – 2nd Sunday in Advent

Welcome to the Second Sunday of Advent! Every year on this Sunday we hear a gospel account where John calls people to repentance. There are two things we can learn from this gospel that are relevant to our Christmas preparation. First, we need to prepare ourselves for the coming of Jesus by having a significant conversion in our lives. This is not just by a pre-Christmas confession to tidy ourselves up and get rid of some of the things we regret having done in recent months.

Peter, in today's Second Reading, tells us that a "day" with the Lord can be a 1,000 years. This is probably directed at those who thought (and perhaps feared) that the Lord was coming soon:

The Lord is not slow about his promise to come again, as some think of slowness, but is patient with all, not wanting any to perish but everyone to come to repentance.

In other words, if the end of the world seems so slow in coming, it is to give people time to mend their ways, to redirect their lives.

At the same time, he also warns that the coming can be very sudden, as we all know is very true. We all know people who have been taken away from us very suddenly, without warning. A friend of mine experienced that with the loss of a close friend this month.

Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of persons ought you to be in leading lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God...Therefore, beloved, while you are waiting for these things, strive to be found by him at peace, without spot or blemish...

Notice he prays that you will "be found by him at peace". The coming of the Lord does not fill his friends with fear and anxiety, but rather with a kind of joyful anticipation of one friend to another. The fruit of our every day living the Way of Jesus is a real interior peace that makes us ready to meet him at any time.

Let us reflect then at this time on what changes we should make in our own lives, not just now but in the year that is to come. What kind of person would I like to be? What kind of person should I be? What kind of person could I be? What kind of person do I think God would like me to be?

John the Baptist also prepared the way for Jesus to come into our lives. The First Reading speaks about filling in valleys, smoothing out mountains and hills, transforming cliffs into plains, and ridges into valleys. In other words, removing all the obstacles that get in the way of our meeting with Jesus, because:

Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.

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That is also our role as Christians. It is only through what we say and do that others can come to know Jesus. So many people we know face many obstacles in getting to know the real Jesus (and, to be honest, sometimes we ourselves are those obstacles).

Why do so many young people stop going to church and give up the practice of their faith? Where did they get the ideas of Christianity which they have – or don't have? Who is responsible?

I don't think we have to look very far to answer these questions. It is a fact that the negligence of Christians undermines faith in Christ far more effectively than the most savage persecution of the sworn enemies of Christ. The Church never thrives so vigorously as under persecution from outsiders. It is the betrayal of those who are inside which does the real damage. Recent Church history shows this to be true.

So where does this leave us. Each of us can reach people that no one else can reach – our family members, relatives, work colleagues and other people who may come into our life.

So, there are two wonderful ways to prepare for Christmas:

Personal conversion: What better present could I give myself?

Leading someone else to know and experience the love of Jesus: What better present could I give to another person?

May you receive and give the present you really need this Christmas and in the New Year, the gift of Jesus Christ. Amen.