

Second Sunday of Advent C/2006

Our God is a God of salvation and consolation. He brings his salvation to everyone in need of it and who hopes in his love. All the readings of this Sunday talk about God's intervention in human history to bring his salvation to the world.

In the first reading, the prophet Baruch announces for Jerusalem a period of consolation and visitation from God. The time of mourning and misery is over. Now is the time of rejoicing and gladness, a time of peace and justice, where all the earth will see the glory of Jerusalem, and where God will gather all the scattered children of Israel from the East and the West of the world. Jerusalem will receive a new name and become again a land of worship and peace for all the people. All its children will come back and enjoy the beauty of their land and the bounty of their God.

Because God comes, what shall his people do? They should prepare for him a place in their hearts and in their lives. Hence, the powerful symbols the prophet uses in inviting the people of Israel to lower the lofty mountain and to level the ground so that they may walk secure in the glory of God. What the text teaches, in other words, is that in order to know transformation and improvement of our situation, we must let God flatten the mountains and cliffs, fill up our valleys that keep us far from him and away from our brothers and sisters. We have to throw away the mantle of sorrow and distress, and to wrap the cloak of integrity, justice and peace.

Advent is precisely that, such a tremendous time of preparation for the coming of the Lord, a time of cleansing, and a spiritual opportunity to give God more place in our lives. As we prepare ourselves every year for the feast of Christmas, Advent comes like an invitation to update our relationship with the Lord and with one another, to ask ourselves where we stand before God in our lives. That is why the message John the Baptist addressed his fellow countrymen, inviting them to conversion, sounds again urgent to our ears today. Who can resist such a call?

First of all, the Gospel starts by giving us precise historic details about John the Baptist as the precursor of Jesus. The point of this historical data should remind us that Jesus Christ, who we are awaiting for his second coming, is not a legend or a myth, but a historical figure. He lived in this world in an appointed time and under particular circumstances and a well-known government.

However, as human history goes on and distance takes place between the first apparition of Jesus and his second coming, we run the risk of overlooking the importance of this event. Even our post-modern culture is not in a mood of helping us keep the memory of Jesus alive until he comes back. For that reason it is important to listen again and again to the message of the Baptist and to act accordingly.

John's message is all about preparing the road for the Lord who is coming. May it be clear to each one of us here present that the road we are talking about is not a material road like our streets, avenues or boulevards. It is all about spiritual

roads. Where are the spiritual roads situated? Of course, in our hearts. A heart can be like a parched path, or dirty street or a badly-lit boulevard and likewise. All these images aim to warn us about our state before the Lord. They intend to invite us to conversion in order to welcome the Lord.

Nobody has the right to say that it is too late, or that his/her past is so heavy that the Lord will never accept to forgive him. That is only a human struggle in our mind, but not at the side of the Lord. The Lord rejoices when we approach him in humility and sincerity, seeking to normalize our relationship with him. What counts for him is not our past, as bad as it might have been, but our future. This future is so important that he gives a new chance for a new beginning.

Mind you that we are not awaiting the appearance of a baby in a manger, but rather an adult Jesus who has been victorious over sin and death, and who has promised to come again at an unknown time. If he could come for you right now, would you be ready?

What we need, beloved, is that we encourage each other so that we may walk steadfastly toward the encounter with Jesus. As the fellow countrymen of John heeded his voice and accepted the baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sin, we too have to leave sin behind us and reconcile with God, with ourselves and with one another. We all need help and encouragement to leave behind familiar ways which have become destructive. We need help in imagining ourselves differently, and imagining the good effect this will have on others. We have to take time to reflect what kind of person God wants us to be, what his plan is for us. We need faith in the future, our future, to see the power of God working in the change.

St. Paul in the second reading has shown us that people begin to change when they are encouraged to see the best in themselves, not when they are asked to dwell with the worst in themselves. Do not be afraid about the past, your past; but look forward, where the Lord is calling you. The Lord expects us, in this time of Advent, to increase our love and knowledge of him. In our continual changing culture, we have to discern what is of value, so that we may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and the praise of God. May God bless you all!



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