

## **Second Sunday of Advent A/2007**

Two thousand years ago, Jesus Christ came to save the world. In spite of the entire mission he has accomplished, there are still, however, many places and situations in which Jesus has not yet entered. What can be done so that Christ reaches these places and situations? What would happen, and what would be the face of our world, if Jesus reached these places and situations?

All the readings of this Sunday try to answer these questions by showing us the right path we have to follow in order to let Jesus enter our world and transform it. In the first reading, the prophet Isaiah describes the vision of a new world that has already dawned and that will be manifested when the advent of the Lord is achieved in all its fullness. When the Lord will establish definitively his reign, the world will become a place of perpetual peace and the inhabitants of the earth will live in perfect harmony with one another, as it was at the beginning of creation.

The historical context of this prophecy refers to King David and his successors. In fact, after the reign of David, the Kings who succeeded him disappointed the people with their leadership. The kings forgot to apply justice and to care for the people. As a consequence, the social situation deteriorated with conflicts and injustice, while many abandoned the true worship of the Lord.

In order to change that situation, God promised to raise another king, full of wisdom and the spirit of the knowledge of the Lord, from the offspring of Jesse, the father of David, who will judge not by appearance, but with justice and decide aright for the afflicted. The outcome of that reign will be a perpetual peace and harmony all over the world. Peace and harmony will affect not only human beings, but equally the cosmic order. That is what Isaiah proclaims in terms like the wolf shall be a guest for the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; the calf and the young lion shall browse together with a little child to guide them. Or the lion shall eat hay like the ox, etc...

When a prophecy is given, it always has a short term and a long term. If the short term of this vision refers to the history of Israel, its long term refers to the whole universe that will be affected by the message of Jesus Christ whom the Father will send to reconcile, forever, the world with him in his blood on the cross. And yet, we know that even after the coming of Jesus, our world is still surrounded by injustice, conflicts, violence and wars; it is hardly that we have peace. Hence, this longing in our hearts that Jesus comes again to set us and our world free.

In this respect, Advent means a longing that Jesus comes again. Of course, Jesus will come at the end of time as he has promised, but Jesus comes today, right now, when we open our hearts to him. If you dare open your heart to Jesus now, he will come and make his dwelling within you (Rev. 3, 20). This now and this today prepare us for the encounter with him at the end of time.

In order for that encounter to happen, we have to convert; in order to convert, we have to change; in order to change, we have to let ourselves be touched by his word. The words of John the Baptist to the people of his time are addressed to us today: "Repent, (...). Prepare the way of the Lord!" This is an urgent message

that requires an immediate decision. Do not delay for tomorrow what you can do for today. The repentance John talks about is a turn from evil to God.

To prepare the way of the Lord means to let ourselves be open to his promise and accept that he purifies us and sets us free from any evil that would prevent us to welcome his kingdom. In that perspective, to repent is more than moral commitment; it is all about letting our hearts be flexible to the words of Jesus so that he transforms us; it is all about the specific change we have to bring into our lives so that we may be guided by the One who baptizes in the Spirit and in fire.

As John called the whole Israel without exception, we are all called to the change of heart. That is the challenge which is addressed to each one of us. There are no exceptions. We are probably aware of areas in our lives that need to be changed and to be touched by the power of God's forgiveness. Let us take advantage of Advent to do it. We must avoid making the same mistakes like the Pharisees and the Sadducees who thought that their belonging to the descendants of Abraham would guarantee their salvation. No; family trees are not different from other trees: good roots are not enough; these must bear fruits that others can see and be nourished with. Roots refer to the past and fruits give an idea of the health of the tree today. The exterior appearance of belonging to the Church is not enough for our salvation; we have to convert..

That is why, it is important not to lock up ourselves in our habits, especially when these do not contribute to harmonious and peaceful relationships with God, with ourselves, with our fellows and those around us, when they do not bring any improvement in our relationships with God and others. Advent is precisely an opportunity God gives us to act and do something, a time for an effort of transformation and conversion.

Why are we told the story of John the Baptist about his preaching on conversion to the people of Israel at this time of Advent? Saint Paul says, in the second reading, that all this has been written for our instruction so that by our endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope in Jesus Christ. In other words, in spite of all the difficulties we can have in our present life and those we are confronted with in our personal life and our life of faith, we should not be discouraged. We have to persevere in the awaiting of the fulfillment of God's promise of a new world. We are certainly dreaming of God's gift of perpetual peace over our world, but that peace has to start by the way we build it on a daily basis in our relationships with one another, including in our families and circle of friends. In this time of Advent may God help us build peace around us until the day it is complete in his Kingdom. May God bless you in the efforts you provide for the change you want to bring in your life!

**Isaiah 11, 1-10; Roams 15, 4-9; Matthew 3, 1-12**



Homily Date: December 9, 2007

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Contact: [www.mbala.org](http://www.mbala.org)

Document Name: 20071209homily.pdf