

2nd Sunday of Advent A/2010

We come today to the second Sunday of Advent. All the readings of this day invite us to prepare the way of the Lord. The first reading recalls the dream of Israel formulated in the prophecy of Isaiah. In fact, after many years of disappointment because of bad leadership in the country, God raised the hope of the people by promising a new King to Israel. That king will be different from the others, a king after the example of David and from the house of David.

His reign will be an exceptional one, a reign of justice and reconciliation between peoples and peoples, between people and God, and between people and nature. Because the new king will be invested with the divine Spirit, he will not judge according to the human mind, but with God's guidance of wisdom and discernment. Through his action, peace will be extended to the whole world, from human beings to the natural world. That is why the prophet says that the cow will be the guest of the bear, the wolf the guest of the lamb, the lion will eat hay like the ox, and the baby shall play by the cobra's den without concern.

Through the ups and the downs of the life of Israel, in sorrows and in joys, this dream did not die. It was alive in the collective memory of the people. Against the backdrop of human vicissitudes, Israel hoped that one day this dream will become true and God will fulfill his promise to raise a wonderful king who will bring peace to Israel and to the world.

Now let us ask a question: why are we told this story today, especially at the beginning of this time of Advent? St Paul answers that it is in order to give us instruction so that by our endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. But this is not hope for nothing. It is hope for Jesus Christ in whom God has fulfilled that promise made to the patriarchs.

The consequence of all this is that whatever might be our situation today and all the difficulties we are facing on a daily basis, we should never despair. Sometimes our dreams for peace in the world and in our lives, our desire for consolation and our aspiration for the healing of the brokenness of our families and our relationships have been disappointed. In spite of all that, however, we have to trust Jesus and believe in his promise of a new world. That new world, which is a gift from God, is at the same time a duty. We have to build peace around us, in our families and in the world. We have to build peace in our relationships with one another.

Because the premises of a new world are already given to us with the presence of Jesus in the world, St Paul invites us to glorify the God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ for his mercy toward us, as it has pleased him that we share in that promise. Because God has blessed us in Jesus Christ, we have to welcome one another as Christ himself welcomed us for the glory of the Father. Because Jesus has established peace between us and the Father, we have to live in harmony with one another for the glory of the Father.

At the beginning of this time of Advent, these recommendations are important to us. They are similar to what John the Baptist was asking of the people of his time before the coming of the Messiah. The essential message of John was about the conversion of heart and the repentance from sins.

Like the people of Israel, we too have to repent from our sins. We have to live up to the high standards of life. Like the people of Israel, we have to prepare the way in our hearts for the Lord. We have to make straight his paths so that any time he comes, he might find us prepared and ready.

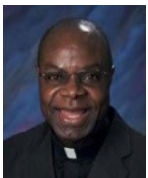
In practice, it means that we have to accept to continually purify ourselves through the sacrament of confession in order to reconcile with God and our fellows. We have to fight anything in our life that is an obstacle in the flourishing of our relationship with Jesus. We have to let ourselves be transformed by the word of Jesus and change our minds, our conduct, and our lives accordingly.

It serves no purpose to claim the privilege of family or background like the Jews who believed that simply because they were descendants of Abraham, they had a guaranty for salvation. No, that is not enough; though it can sometimes work in politics; it cannot, however, work in religion. We cannot live on the spiritual capital or heritage of our family. This is the time of personal choice and decision. We cannot claim salvation for the sake of a heroic past of our folks. It is like a criminal son who claims his innocence on the merits of his honest father or mother.

That is why on this second Sunday of Advent, John invites us to repentance. One of the things from which we have to repent is our pride, this vice that pushes us to esteem ourselves better than others. John himself gives us an example as he recognizes that the one who comes after him is bigger than himself. We have to humble ourselves and recognize who we truly are as simple human beings, frail, weak and sinners. Whatever might be our social standard, we are just simple human beings like any other, and not gods.

Without repentance, there is no way of enjoying God's forgiveness and salvation. A true repentance does not lie merely in a sentimental sorrow, but in a real change of life. After all, a true repentance should produce fruit as evidence and result of the change we have undergone. That is the demand of this second Sunday and for which we have to strive. Let us ask the Lord to help us through the grace of his Holy Spirit to take advantage of this wonderful time to come close to him and to repent of our sins. May God bless you all!

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



Homily Date: December 5, 2010

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Document Name: 20101205homily.pdf