

Second Sunday of Advent C/2012

The readings of this second Sunday of Advent talk about the return of the Lord and the spiritual preparation for that event. They invite us to take seriously that coming event by preparing the road for the Lord. They invite us in particular to the repentance of life so that when the Lord comes again he may find us ready.

The first reading of the book of Baruch describes the transformation that will happen in Israel when God will intervene in the life of his people. At that time, mourning and misery will end in Jerusalem, because God's splendor of glory and justice will shine everywhere.

That is why he invites the city of Jerusalem to stand up and enjoin the return of its children from all over the Lord. Although the children of Israel have left the country in dismay and tears, they will come back with glory in the land, led by the Lord. For that reason, they have to prepare the way by leveling mountains and grounds, by cutting forests and trees.

What is behind this text is the idea that God is the comforter and the consolation of his people. Whatever might be his misery and sadness, God will always intervene and put an end to it. But, in order to enjoy God's visit and his consolation, his people must prepare for it.

This text allows us to understand the point of today's Gospel as it invites us to prepare the way for the coming of the Lord. The Gospel starts with a historic element by situating the ministry of John the Baptist, the precursor of Jesus, in the political context of his time.

Then, the Gospel gives the geographic setting of the ministry of John, namely from the desert where he lived before working, to the region of Jordan where he started the proclamation of the baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

Finally, the Gospel gives the content of the ministry of John by showing what his proclamation was all about. Using images related to the development of the land, he invited people to repentance and change of life.

What do we learn from this Gospel? The first thing I want to bring is about the chance of rewriting our spiritual history. What do I mean with that? In fact, when I was reading this Gospel, I was struck by the fact that Luke starts the narrative on the ministry of John the Baptist by putting it in a historical context.

Why is he doing so? His intention is certainly to remind us that John the Baptist, who was talking to people about repentance, was not a legend or a myth, but a historical figure who can be easily situated in human history. He did live in this world at an appointed time and under particular circumstances and a well-known government.

We have, however, to remember that any historic setting has a real as well as a symbolic outreach. At that moment of history when God called John, he wanted the people to change, to get out of themselves and to prepare for the coming of his Son. That is why he sent John and communicated to him his word to tell them. John, in turn, invited people to accept God's offer and write a new chapter of their relationship with him by accepting his message of repentance.

If we refer to our history, we have to say that God wants that what happened to the people of the time of John may happen to us today. That is why, he gives us the opportunity to write anew the history of our relationship with him by accepting the call to conversion through the listening of the same message he gave to John the Baptist two thousand years ago.

If that is true, then, nobody has the right to say that it is too late for him with regard to God's offer of rewriting a new chapter of our life with him. Remember that history contains always two sides, one backward and another forward. When we look backward, we might be afraid by what happened to us or what we have done in the course of life.

However, whatever might be our past, God does not abandon us. He rejoices when we approach him with the intention of normalizing our relationship with him. In that perspective, what counts is not our past, as bad as it might have been, but our future. That is why history is also written by looking forward and not backward.

The second thing I want to highlight is the urgency of repentance. If we have to write anew the spiritual history of our life, then, we have to change something from our present life so that it matches God's history. That is the main reason why John was insisting on repentance and the necessity of preparing the way for Lord.

The way to prepare that John is talking about is not the streets of our counties, or the avenues of our towns or the highways of our cities. It is all about us and our hearts. It is in our hearts that valleys, ways and mountains are situated. It is there the change has to happen first. Because a human heart can be as dirty as is a street, uneven as is a highway. These images invite us to think about the state of our heart before God and to repent.

What a wonderful time to do that than Advent. Advent is, indeed, a time of preparation for the coming of the Lord and of cleansing. It is a spiritual opportunity to give God more place in our lives than we have done up to now. It is a time of writing a new chapter of our life with God and of renewing our relationship with him and with our fellows. Let us pray, then, that God may help us to take advantage of this time and come close to him. May God bless you all!

Baruch 5: 1-9; Philippians 1: 4-6, 8-11; Luke 3: 1-6



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