

Second Sunday of Advent C2018

The readings of this second Sunday of Advent talk about the preparation for the return of the Lord Jesus. They show how God is merciful in intervening in human history in order to change its course. They invite us to repent of our sins so that we make ourselves ready to welcome the Lord.

The first reading speaks of the prophecy of the prophet Baruch. It announces the return from exile of the people of Israel to their country. It shows how Jerusalem will be transfigured with joy as her children will be coming from all over the world. It shows also that all that joy will have God as its author and glory. Finally, it invites Jerusalem to prepare for that great event by physical preparation and the bettering of the land.

What is behind this text is the idea that God is the comforter and the consolation of his people. There is also the idea that whatever might be the suffering of his people, God will always put an end to it. The last idea is related to the truth that there cannot be a true welcome of God when a person is not repentant.

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 account 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 the 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 by using images related to landscape and by inviting people to repentance and change of life.

What do we learn from this Gospel? Today I want to talk about the necessity of re-writing our spiritual history in the awaiting of the return of the Lord. What do I mean by that? Let me explain. In fact, each one of us has a history, which is made up of the events that have crossed it. Some of those events are good, others are bad; some are wonderful, others are regrettable; but they are all part of our history.

The whole range of human history contains two sides, namely one backward and another forward. In fact, human history can be looked at backward or forward. When we look backward, we might be afraid by what happened to us or what we have done in the course of life, as well as we can rejoice for good things that happened to us or we have accomplished.

In the case of missed opportunities, when people look back at their life, they sometimes say, if I could start again, I would not do the same thing, or if I would have been given the chance to do otherwise, I will try again, etc. By saying so, there is a tacit recognition that history is not completely closed; it is still in the making, that if a possibility opens up, one's history can be changed for the best in spite of missed opportunities.

For me, this vision is the key to the understanding of the message of John the Baptist. In fact, by preaching to the different categories of people throughout the whole of the Jordan, John the Baptist wanted to draw their attention to the fact that an important event was about to happen in their midst, namely the coming of the Messiah.

Of course they had made some decisions for their life and because of that their life had taken the direction it had at that time. But, by sending the Messiah, God was giving them an opportunity to re-write the history of their life and the possibility of giving a new orientation to the history of their life.

I believe that is the reason why John was calling them to repentance and conversion. In fact, John wanted them to change, to get out of themselves and to prepare for the coming of the Messiah. He wanted them to accept God's offer and write a new chapter of their relationship with him by accepting his message.

To re-write a new history means to change something of the present life so that it matches God's expectations and will. That is the reason why John was insisting on repentance and the necessity of preparing the way for the Lord.

The way to prepare that John is talking about is not the streets of the country, or the avenues of towns or the highways of the cities. No; it is all about human hearts; because it is within our hearts that valleys, ways and mountains are situated. It is there the change has to take place, because a human heart can be as dirty as is a street, uneven as is a highway. If, then, a heart is not changed, it is very difficult for the person to change.

The images John uses aim at inviting us to think about the state of our heart before God and to do something at this time of Advent. There is no more wonderful preparation for Christmas than to give a little bit of room in our heart to Jesus. The challenge we are all facing is whether we will listen to this call or will we let this Christmas pass again like that of last year or those of years before without bringing any change in our relationship with God and with our fellows. That is why the message that John the Baptist addressed to his fellow countrymen, inviting them to the conversion of heart, sounds urgent again to our ears today.

In that sense, Advent is, indeed, a time of preparation for the Lord and of cleansing of heart. It comes like an invitation to update our relationships with God and with one another, to ask ourselves where we stand before God in our lives. 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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