

## Second Sunday of Advent B2023

I want to start this homily with the wonderful words of St Augustin I found in one of his writings: "Return to the heart! Why are you running away from yourselves? Why are you getting lost, outside yourselves, entering on deserted ways? (...). Come back! (...) Return immediately to your heart! (...) Know the source of your existence" [Tractate on John 18.10.1].

The source of our existence is God who, on this particular moment of our life, is inviting us to welcome his Son Jesus we will be celebrating at Christmas. We are on journey to that encounter with the Son of God and Savior, Jesus Christ. The time of Advent sets us in move to meet our Lord. This is an important event, worth being spiritually prepared with utmost care.

In fact, when someone is waiting for an important event to happen to him, he prepares it seriously. No student will show up for a test without having prepared for it. No searcher of an employment will show up for an interview without having asked the question of how he will handle the new job to satisfy the expectations of his employer. No woman about to give birth will come to the day of delivery without having prepared things for the baby and for herself.

God wants us to prepare too for this great event of the celebration of Christ's birth at Christmas. What is required is not about material things we need to have ready, like cloths, or a list of questions we have to answer in order to show our knowledge and readiness. It is all about our spiritual preparation, an effort to create a space in our hearts for Jesus to come and dwell, the strength to create a spiritual and serene atmosphere around our families and ourselves...

Like on the time of John the Baptist, the same message of God resonates with the same intensity today: "Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths". What we have to remove from us to straight the paths of the Lord is the dirt of our sins and all our intentional rebellion that pushes us to never care even where we are visibly wrong. The baptism of repentance that John was offering symbolizes the purification we need to obtain from the sacraments of the Church, especially the sacrament of reconciliation. We need that purification today more than ever.

Each one of us has to identify in his life, as the prophet Isaiah recommends, his valleys, mountains, rugged lands and rough country that prevent the Lord a clear and smooth access to him. It would be an illusion to think that because we did not swear, we did not kill, we did not steal, we did not commit adultery, things are all right. What about the state our relationship with the spouse, our children, the members of our family, our neighbor or God himself? If we change our life and behavior, this coming Christmas will be different from many we have celebrated in the past. It will bring us peace and joy of Christ.

When John the Baptist was baptizing at the Jordan River, he did not only speak, but he also gave to all an example of humility. He acknowledged that he was not the Christ, but just his unworthy herald. He conceded that Christ was mightier than him to the point that he could not loosen the throngs of his sandals.

This time of advent gives us an opportunity to think about the virtue of humility. One of the plagues that destroy many people and their relationship with one another is pride. In principle, there is nothing wrong with pride as far as it is the source of our self-esteem and self-acceptance. However, pride can blind us to the merits of our fellows. It can make us incapable of accepting our limits and flaws so that we attribute ourselves an undue glory we do not deserve. Because of that, some people are incapable of accepting they are wrong. As they do not acknowledge their faults, they never ask forgiveness when they mess up things.

By his attitude, John teaches us how humility can be a source of honesty and sincerity. It can help us recognize our real place in the world, as creatures, and the particular place we have to give to God, as our creator. Without humility, there is no purification and healing of our relationship with God and our fellows.

These are the things we have to do this time of Advent to come close to our God and prepare a path for Jesus we will be celebrating at Christmas. We have to remember that we are in the time of the awaiting of the Lord. Because God's time is not human time, we have to be on watch. As St Peter reminds us in the second reading, the day of the Lord will be like a thief coming without a warning. The world and the life we know are passing. We are created for a communion with God beyond death. We should not waste our lives and find ourselves unprepared when the time of our own death comes.

We have also to remember that the time of Advent is an opportunity that God gives us to repent and renounce our sins. Every day that comes up, and we spend on earth, is a gift God gives us to prepare for his return. His delay is beneficial to us; it is a grace and a chance for us who struggle so much to adjust to our Lord's commands.

On Advent, the Church is inviting us to relive this unique experience, knowing that God wants to visit us again this Christmas with the perfect gift – the gift of his Son coming into our hearts and into our homes to share with us the Spirit of love, the love that is his personal communion with God, his Father and our father. Let us not miss such a great opportunity. Let us change our lives and our hearts by repenting of our sins for the feast of our salvation.

**Isaiah 40: 1-5, 9-11; 2 Peter 3: 8-14; Mark 1: 1-8**



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