

2nd Sunday of Advent

December 10, 2017

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Ahhhhh! The second letter of Peter, “Do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years and a thousand years like one day. The Lord does not delay his promise, as some regard “delay,” but he is patient with you, not wishing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.” How many times have we as parents said to one of our children, “You better get over here and tell your sister you’re sorry for calling her stupid.” Only to have them say, “Okay! I’m sorry for calling you stupid. Dummy!” It is in these moments that we as parents hopefully learn patience and come to the realization that sorrow and repentance are not the same thing. We come to the realization that repentance is difficult to teach and true sorrow is simply the beginning. The English philosopher Thomas Carlyle wrote, “Of all the acts of man repentance is the most divine. — The greatest of all faults is to be conscious of none.” If parents could just count the number of times children have responded, “I didn’t do anything!!!”

“John the Baptist appeared in the desert proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.” Repentance is one of those words having a threefold definition. **Repentance** is defined as the activity of reviewing one's actions and feeling contrition or regret for past wrongs, accepting responsibility for our action and making a commitment to change for the better. Repentance and sorrow are not the same thing. Sorrow is simply an ingredient of repentance. In other words, repentance involves being sorry for one's misdeeds while at the same time realizing that sorrow isn't enough, amends must be made, one must take action to change their behavior in the future for repentance to be complete. Repentance, without change of behavior is like continually pumping water out of a leaky boat without ever trying to fix the leak. True repentance is to cease from sinning.

John the Baptist was clothed in camel's hair with a leather belt around his waist. He dressed like Elijah the prophet who called for Israel to repent, to turn back to God's ways. He didn't dress like the Scribes, Pharisees and Temple priests. He didn't look like them. He didn't talk like them. He was not part of the crowd that had always held power. But the people listened, and followed. John the Baptist spoke the words of Isaiah telling the people to prepare for changes that were sure to come. Isaiah spoke of external changes that had to be done in preparation for the Lord's arrival. John equates the external with the eternal. The desert is within our own souls. The wasteland, the mountains, the valleys, the rugged land are all within our own behaviors. We will see the glory of God when we have made smooth our own actions, our own sins, our own poor behaviors. The thing is for the change to take place, for the preparation to be complete, it is we the people who must change. If there is going to be no more war, then people need to stop hating others. If there is going to be charity and care for all, then people needed to look inside their' hearts and pull out the justice of God that resides there.

“Prepare for the Lord,” John the Baptist proclaimed. “Prepare for the Lord by preparing yourselves.” And the people from throughout the Judean countryside and the inhabitants of

Jerusalem went out to the Jordan River where John was preaching. If there is going to be change, then people needed to change. And they confessed their sins. And they were baptized. And the change began. Repentance sought to become complete.

We all want our country and our world to be better. We all want a cure for cancer and AIDS and malnutrition, and every ailment or condition that is killing people. We all want the poor to be cared for. We all want an end to violence both that which is carried out by terrorists and that which takes place in every town and city throughout the world. We all want peace. We all want peace even in our own homes. But what are we doing about it? Are we all simply wringing our hands in dismay and crying out, "Why doesn't someone do something?" The heart of John the Baptist's message is that if we want change, then it is each of us who need to begin the change. American clergyman William Nevins wrote, "He that waits for repentance, waits for that which cannot be had as long as it is waited for. It is absurd for a man to wait for that which he himself has to do."

This is tough. It is just so much easier to sit back and expect the government to change, the world to change, other people to change. But if we really want change, change we can believe in, change that will directly affect our life now then we are what needs to change. The Gospel is calling us to look to ourselves. How do we respond when we are called to choose love or hate? So often we choose hate. We claim that our hatred is justified. But hatred is never justified. How can we expect there to be peace in the world, when we respond to hate with hate? God is calling us to look inside ourselves and respond to hate with love. If we want the world to change, we need to change.

Every year many of us go on rants about how society is trying to destroy the meaning of Christmas. We decry the use of the terms *Holiday Season* or *Winter Holidays*, or *Seasons Greetings*, as well we should. We are saddened that a spiritual celebration has been transformed into a series of parties. And we should be sad. But, perhaps, we should all be less concerned with the commercialization of Christmas and the debasement of Christmas and be more concerned with how we ourselves plan to celebrate Christmas. More than that, we should be more concerned with how we are celebrating Advent. What exactly are you and I doing to prepare the world for Jesus Christ? John the Baptist tells us to look within ourselves at our own problems, change our own attitudes, change our own actions and then trust God to allow this change to have a part in the transformation of the world. Mere sorrow, which weeps and sits still, is not repentance. — Repentance is sorrow converted into action; into movement toward a new and better life. Perhaps the greatest gift we can give our King this Christmas is to never need confess the same sins again because we have been truly repentant.