

SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT – YEAR A

(Isaiah 11.1-10; Romans 15.4-9; Matthew 3.1-12)

Excerpts of Pope Francis – Angelus 04 Dec 2022

Father Charles Fillion

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Brothers & sisters, you might have a question after hearing today's Gospel. Why does the Church propose John the Baptist each year as our primary travelling companion during this Season of Advent? What is the message the Church gives us today with John? Most people would probably stay far away of him because he “wore a garment of camel's hair”, and “his food was locusts and wild honey” (Mt 3:4). At first sight might he appear somewhat harsh and could instil a certain fear. However, John the Baptist invited everyone to conversion: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand”! (v. 2) He preached that the Kingdom is near. Isn't that a common theme during Advent?

In reality, the Baptist was a man who attracted people. For example, when the Pharisees and Sadducees, who were known for their hypocrisy, approached him, he spoke to them in a very strong way! In fact, some of them probably went to him out of curiosity or opportunism because John had become quite popular. These Pharisees and Sadducees were content with themselves and, faced with the Baptist's sharp appeal, they justified themselves by saying: “We have Abraham as our father” (v. 9). Therefore, they did not welcome the moment of grace, the opportunity to begin a new life. They were closed in the presumption of being right. So, John says to them: “Bear fruit that befits repentance!” (v. 8). This is a cry of love, like the cry of a father who sees his son ruining himself and tells him: “Don't throw your life away”!

In essence, hypocrisy is the greatest danger because it can ruin even the most sacred realities. Hypocrisy is a serious danger. This is why the Baptist — as Jesus would be later — was harsh with hypocrites. And why do the Baptist and Jesus do this? To shake them up. Those who felt they were sinners “went out to [John], and they were baptized by him, confessing their sins” (cf. v. 5). Therefore, ability is not important to welcome God, but rather humility. This is the path to welcome God. Not aptitude: “We are strong, We are great people...”! No. Humility. “I am a sinner”. But not in an abstract way. Each of us has to confess our own sins, our own failings, our own hypocrisy, firstly to ourselves. We have to get off the pedestal and immerse ourselves in the water of repentance.

Brothers and sisters, perhaps we look at others from top to bottom, thinking that we are better than them, that we have our lives under control, that we do not need God or the Church, or even our brothers or sisters. Yes, when someone is down, it is necessary to help them get up. Advent is a time of grace to take off our masks, and be humble, to be free from believing we are self-sufficient, to welcome God's pardon, to ask forgiveness from those we offended. This is how to begin a new life.

There is only one way, the way of humility — to purify ourselves from the sense of superiority, from hypocrisy, and to see Jesus as the Saviour who comes for us, with our poverty, misery and failings, above all with our need to be raised up, forgiven and saved. And let us remember another thing: with Jesus, there is always the possibility of beginning again. It is never too late. There is always the possibility to begin again. Take courage. He is close to us and this is a time of conversion. Each of us can think, I thought this was just during Lent. Actually, conversion, asking forgiveness, receiving it through confession, is always an ongoing journey. There is always the possibility of taking a step forward.

God is waiting for us and never grows tired of us. We might be annoyed, but God never grows tired! Let us listen to John the Baptist's appeal to return to God. And let us not let this Advent go by like days on the calendar because this is a time of grace, here and now!

May Mary, the humble servant of the Lord, help us to meet him, and be on the way of humility, which is the only one that will help us go ahead.

The schedule for confessions in the various parishes of our diocese can be found in the bulletin and on our website.