

Second Sunday of Advent - B
Isaiah 40:1-5 , 9-11;
II Peter 3 :8-14;
Mark 1:1-8
Little Flower - 12/10/17

My Brothers and Sisters,

Today we celebrate the Second Sunday of Advent.

Today's Gospel introduces John the Baptist. As the last prophet of the Old Testament and the first prophet of the New Testament, he was the bridge between the two Testaments. John is also called the Precursor. *Precursor* comes from the Latin *prae + currere*, which literally means to "run before." This title comes from the beginning of today's Gospel quoting the Prophet Isaiah, "*Behold, I am sending my messenger ahead of you; he will prepare your way.*" In today's Gospel, John is very clear that he is the messenger and not the Messiah: "*one mightier than I is coming after me.*"

Immediately after quoting Isaiah, Mark defined the ministry of John the Baptist: "*John the Baptist appeared in the desert proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.*" Although he was calling people to repentance, people responded to him in a very positive way. St. Mark tells us that "*People of the whole Judean countryside and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem were going out to him and were being baptized by him....*" Likewise, Jesus would begin his own preaching calling for repentance: "*This is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel*" [Mk. 1:15].

Both John the Baptist and Jesus call for repentance. The Greek word for repentance is *metanoia*, which means a complete change of direction in life or to turn around one's life. When we think of repentance, we normally think of being sorry for our specific faults and sins and promising to rid ourselves of them. Both John and Jesus, I believe, are calling for a far more radical repentance. I would suggest that Jesus and John are calling us, first of all, to radically turn away from selfishness and sin and turn toward God and others in love.

To understand this, we have to understand that we live our Christian response to God on three levels. First, there are our concrete actions and omissions. Second, there are our values. Third, there is the fundamental option where we live in love for God and others or where we live radically selfish and self-centered lives. Ideally our actions are consistent with our values, and our values are consistent with our fundamental option. However, they are not always consistent. Sometimes our actions are not in accord with our values. Sometimes our values are not in accord with our fundamental option. Radical repentance demands that we strive to make our actions and values consistent with our option for God and others over self, our option for love over selfishness.

Today's reading from Isaiah gives us a more practical insight into sin and repentance. Isaiah wrote, "*A voice cries out: In the desert prepare the way of the LORD! Make straight in the wasteland a highway for our God! Every valley shall be filled in, every mountain and hill shall be made low; The rugged land shall be made a plain, the rough country, a broad valley.*" Isaiah is speaking to our hearts. Sin that is part of our lives are the mountains and hills, the rugged land, the rough country, the broad valley that hinder Christ's entry into our hearts. To use a different analogy, sin in our lives is like clutter in a room. It takes up space that Christ wants to occupy in our hearts.

My brothers and sisters, St. Peter wrote, "*But according to his promise we await new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. Therefore, beloved, since you await these things, be eager to be found without spot or blemish before him, at peace.*" Jesus gave us the Sacrament of Reconciliation, which is sometimes called the Sacrament of Peace, as a way to be without spot or blemish before God and to be at peace within ourselves. I encourage you to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation at our Advent Penance Service tomorrow evening at 7 p.m. at Our Lady of Lourdes.