

2nd Sunday of Advent - B
Isaiah 40:1-5, 9-11;
II Peter 3:8-14;
Mark 1:1-8
Little Flower - 12/7/14

My Brothers and Sisters,

Today we celebrate the Second Sunday of Advent. Today's Gospel introduces John the Baptist. John the Baptist was the last prophet of the Old Testament and the first prophet of the New Testament. Therefore, he was the bridge between the two Testaments. He 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.*" Finally, John the Baptist was a cousin of Jesus.

In the Gospels, John the Baptist's message comes off as rigorous. However, since the Gospel begins by quoting from today's reading from Isaiah, we have to understand John's mission and ministry in light of God's charge to Isaiah: "*Comfort, give comfort to my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem...*" Although John preached a baptism of repentance, his announcement of the coming of Jesus was intended primarily to comfort God's people.

This has very practical implications for the Church today. Pope Francis titled his first apostolic exhortation "The Joy of the Gospel." As we know, the word *Gospel* means good news. The Church, therefore, must proclaim the Gospel as good news, good news that comforts people. Last week, I mentioned that we can find all kinds of reasons not to hope. The Gospel should inspire hope. The Gospel or Good News of Jesus Christ should comfort us as we face the problems in our world and in our lives, as we face the messiness and sinfulness of our lives. The Gospel should proclaim that Jesus Christ gives us the promise not only of a better tomorrow, but also of a better today if we come to him. To proclaim the Gospel as good news, the universal Church, and we, the Church, have to let people know that we understand where they are coming from and that we care about them and welcome them.

At the same time, John the Baptist did, in fact, proclaim "*a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.*" Likewise, the heart of Jesus' message was the advent of God's kingdom and the call us to repentance and faith. John and Jesus both call us to change our lives. They call us to turn away from selfishness and sin and turn to God and to others in love and to see ourselves, others, the world, and, above all, God in new ways.

Today's second reading, however, reminds us to be patient with ourselves and others. According to St. Peter, God is patient with us, not wishing that any of us perish but that all of us come to repentance. Changing our lives, turning away from sin and selfishness, turning to God and others in love, seeing in new ways does not happen in an instant. It is a lifelong process. We spend our entire lives trying to make sense of our lives.

My brothers and sisters, our Advent Penance Service will be next Monday, December 15, at 7 p.m. here at Little Flower. Eight priests will hear confessions. Jesus gave us the sacrament of Reconciliation as a comforting gift. Please come. Last Wednesday we had a staff retreat led by Sr. Norma Rocklage from Marian College. She played a song titled "Come as you are": "Come as you are, That's how I want you, Come as you are, Feel quite at home Come as you are, Why stand alone? ... Come as you are, That's how I love you, Come as you are, Trust me again ... Just come as you are!"¹

¹"Come as you are," text and music by Deirdre Browne ibvm, from the album *COME AS YOU ARE including the best of Still Waters* by Fr Paul Gurr, Published by Spectrum Publications Pty Ltd, 1986.