

2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Advent - C  
Baruch 5:1-9;  
Philippians 1:4-6, 8-11;  
Luke 3:1-6  
Little Flower - 12/6/15

My Brothers and Sisters,

Today's Gospel introduces us to John the Baptist. We can rightly say that 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.

John the Baptist was the fulfillment of the prophecy attributed to Isaiah in Mark's Gospel: "*Behold, I am sending my messenger ahead of you; he will prepare your way*" [1:2]. Therefore, he is called the Precursor. Literally, a precursor is someone who runs ahead of someone else. In older English usage, a precursor is a forerunner, i.e., the advance messenger of the person who follows. However, John the Baptist also had the unique privilege of announcing Jesus when he came. When he saw Jesus coming toward him, he proclaimed, "*Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world*" [Jn. 1:29].

Since Tuesday marks the beginning of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy, today I would like to provide some context for understanding this jubilee.

The word *gospel* means good news. The Christian Gospel is the Good News of Jesus Christ. To evangelize is to share the Good News of Jesus with others. Pope John Paul II defined evangelization as "the Church's effort to proclaim to everyone that God loves them, that he has given himself for them in Christ Jesus, and that he invites them to an unending life of happiness."

Someone recently asked me if the phrases *new evangelization* or *re-evangelization* began with Pope Francis. Actually they began with Pope John Paul II. For example, in a 1990 encyclical, he wrote about countries where large numbers of Christians have lost a living sense of faith or no longer consider themselves members of the Church and/or live lives far removed from Christ and the Gospel, which certainly describes our country today. He said that "what is needed is a 'new evangelization' or a 're-evangelization.'"

Pope Francis sees the proclamation of God's mercy in Jesus Christ as the heart of the Gospel, the heart of the new evangelization, the heart of re-evangelization. As Archbishop of Buenos Aires, he lived and worked among the poorest of the poor. I think this is the reason Pope Francis resonates with so many people. Because of his close association with and deep connection to people, he understands that real life and relationships are complicated and messy and that all of us, to some extent, are broken people. Therefore, he has said multiple times that the Church has to be like a field hospital for the wounded. Also, he believes that the Church has to accompany us on our life and faith journeys wherever they may take us. The Church, therefore, is not only for saints, but also for us.

My brothers and sisters, I believe that Pope Francis' understanding of these realities is his basis for the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy. If we want to proclaim the Gospel effectively to all people, we must not only proclaim God's mercy, but also become instruments of God's mercy as a Church and as individual Christians. I think that through this jubilee of mercy, Pope Francis hopes to see the beginning of the fulfillment of Baruch's prophecy in today's first reading: "*Up, Jerusalem! stand upon the heights; look to the east and see your children gathered from the east and the west at the word of the Holy One, rejoicing that they are remembered by God.*"