

2nd Sunday of Advent - C
Baruch 5:1-9;
Philippians 1:4-6, 8-11;
Luke 3:1-6
Little Flower - 12/9/18

My Brothers and Sisters,

In today's Gospel, Luke introduces us to John the Baptist. In the first part of the Gospel, Luke places John the Baptist within the context of Roman, Palestinian, and Jewish history. I would suggest that Luke thought it was necessary to include those details because he wanted to make sure that Christians throughout history would never doubt that John and Jesus were real historical persons.

We believe that John the Baptist had a unique role in salvation history. As the last prophet of the Old Testament and the first prophet of the New Testament, he was the bridge between the two Testaments. According to Luke, John's mission was to proclaim a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins in fulfillment of the prophesy of Isaiah. Because John announced the impending arrival of the Lord, he is called the Precursor, which means "one who runs ahead of."

Today, however, I would like to focus on his mission. *"John went throughout the whole region of the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins...."*

Our Advent Penance Service will be Monday evening at 7:00 p.m. here at Little Flower, and I really want to encourage you to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation with us. Several priests will be available for confessions. As is our tradition, Our Lady of Lourdes will join us as will our second graders who will be receiving their First Reconciliation.

For many years, I have said that there are only two things that still surprise me. They are how little some people know about the people they marry and how badly people treat people they should love. I think I am now ready to add a third. As I talk to more and more people, I never cease to be surprised at how messy and complicated their lives and/or their families' lives are. At least some of the messiness in our lives and families is the result of sin, either the sins of others or our own sins. The Sacrament of Reconciliation can help the healing process.

Although it is always difficult to acknowledge our sins and take responsibility for them, Jesus gave us the Sacrament of Reconciliation not to be a burden but a gift. When we celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation, we encounter the forgiving Christ through the priest. Jesus understood that when we keep our sins inside us, when we keep them hidden, when we hold on to our sins, they eat away at us. Confessing our sins allows us to get them outside of us and then to let go of them. Likewise, when we receive the sacrament, we hear the words of forgiveness. Therefore, in faith, we know that we are really forgiven. As human beings, in all of our relationships, including our relationship with God, we have a need to ask for forgiveness and to be forgiven.

My brothers and sisters, each of our readings today offers an insight into the meaning of God's forgiveness. The book of Baruch was written during the Babylonian Exile. God promised to bring his people home. The sacrament of Reconciliation is a kind of coming home. Paul prayed for the Philippians that their love might increase more and more. Growth in love is a lifelong process with many starts and stops moving forward. Finally, the Gospel quotes Isaiah. Sin creates the valleys, mountains, hills, winding roads, and rough ways that hinder Christ's coming. The Sacrament of Reconciliation creates a straight highway for Jesus into our hearts. On Christmas, we want to celebrate not only Jesus' birth two thousand years ago but his rebirth in our lives and hearts. Nothing will better prepare us to celebrate the real meaning of Christmas than to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation this Advent, especially if we have not celebrated the sacrament for many years.