

2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Advent - A  
Isaiah 11:1-10;  
Romans 15:4-9;  
Matthew 3:1-12  
Little Flower - 12/8/19

My Brothers and Sisters,

Today's reading from Isaiah prophesies the coming of the Messiah upon whom the spirit of the Lord shall rest. His coming will inaugurate the coming of the kingdom of God and begin the realization of God's vision of peace and reconciliation for us and the world: *"...the calf and the young lion shall browse together, with a little child to guide them....There shall be no harm or ruin on all my holy mountain."*

The most interesting figure in today's readings is John the Baptist. We are told that he appeared, preaching in the desert of Judea. He *"wore clothing made of camel's hair and had a leather belt around his waist. His food was locusts and wild honey."* However, his message was the same as Jesus' message would be: *"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."* He challenges his listeners to *"produce good fruit as evidence of [their] repentance"* and not to take faith and salvation for granted. In other words, John called his listeners not to be complacent.

Today's Gospel parallels last Sunday's Gospel. In last Sunday's Gospel, comparing the days of Noah to the days of the coming of the Son of Man, Jesus challenged his listeners not to be complacent: *"In (those) days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day that Noah entered the ark"* [Mt. 24:38].

Today, I think many people are spiritually and morally complacent and take salvation for granted. Perhaps this Advent we might want to respond to Jesus' challenge in last week's Gospel and John's challenge in today's Gospel not to take anyone or anything for granted.

First of all, we should not take our own life or the lives of our loved ones for granted. We have all known seemingly healthy people who have suddenly died. Likewise, we have all known seemingly healthy people who have had their quality of life greatly changed by a stroke or cancer or Alzheimer's. Every day we should thank God for the gift of life and the gift of health for ourselves and our loved ones. Every day we should express our love and gratitude to our loved ones.

When I prepare couples for marriage, I remind them that taking each other or their relationship for granted can destroy a marriage. Also, in 50% of marriages, the relationship is unbalanced. One person is a giver, and the other person is a taker. This Advent I would encourage couples to consciously choose and re-choose each other and their relationship. This Advent I would encourage all of us to look at our primary relationships and ask if they are balanced between giving and receiving.

My guess is that most people assume that they will be saved. Likewise, my guess is that even many good Catholics are complacent about their relationship with God and their moral standing before God. Just as human relationships are never static, the same is true of our relationship of God. This Advent we should try to deepen our personal relationship with God and strive to become a-better-version-of ourselves.

Finally, many Catholics take their parish for granted. They expect that the parish will always be there for them. Likewise, like marriages, parishes have givers and takers. Many parishioners do not attend Mass weekly. Many parishioners do not financially support the parish consistently. Many parishioners are not involved in any ministries. This is true of all parishes. We all need to ask ourselves to what extent we have taken our parish for granted and recommit ourselves to Sunday Mass attendance, financial support, and active engagement in ministries.

My brothers and sisters, in his letter to the Romans, Paul calls us to welcome others and live in harmony with others. This is doing our part to realize God's vision for us.