

2nd Sunday of Advent - B
Isaiah 40:1-5, 9-11;
II Peter 3:8-14;
Mark 1:1-8
Little Flower - 12/6/20

My Brothers and Sisters,

In last Sunday's homily, I suggested that we make hope the focus of our Advent this year.

Today's Gospel introduces John the Baptist. John is also called the Precursor, which literally means to "run before." This title comes from the beginning of today's Gospel which quotes the Prophet Isaiah, "*Behold, I am sending my messenger ahead of you; he will prepare your way.*"

Since today's 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...*" In other words, although John preached a baptism of repentance, his announcement of the coming of Jesus was intended primarily to comfort and to give hope to God's people.

Last Sunday's reading from Isaiah ended, "*Yet, O LORD, you are our father; we are the clay and you the potter: we are all the work of your hands*" [64:8]. In his first reflection for this year's *Best Advent Ever*, Matthew Kelly reminded us that we need to check our connection with God:

When we get disconnected from God, we get disconnected from ourselves.... When we get alienated from God, we get alienated from ourselves, from our best self, from our truest self. Because you can't be the-best-version-of-yourself, you can't become a-better-version-of-yourself separate from God. To the extent that we are connected with God is the extent that we are connected with ourselves and becoming a-better-version-of-ourselves each and every single day.

God is the potter; we are clay.

Some people would have us believe that the pandemic is evidence of God's judgment on us. However, concerning the pandemic, Pope Francis prayed, "You are calling on us to seize this time of trial as a time of choosing. It is not the time of your judgement, but of our judgement: a time to choose what matters and what passes away, a time to separate what is necessary from what is not. It is a time to get our lives back on track with regard to you, Lord, and to others." God is the potter; we are the clay. We allow God to shape our lives to the extent that we use this pandemic to re-examine our priorities.

In other words, I think Pope Francis would argue that the pandemic is a call to conversion. The Greek word for repentance or conversion is *metanoia*. The word *metanoia* implies a complete turn around in our life. However, the root of *metanoia* suggests that metanoia represents a change in the way we see or a new way of seeing. In other words, if we undergo conversion or repentance as John and Jesus used those words, we are going to see all of our relationships in a new way. For example, we will see God as a loving father and ourselves as his beloved sons and daughters. We will see others as brothers and sisters in Christ or brothers and sisters in the human family. We will see the world and our bodies as gifts to be cherished. We will see ourselves as created in the image and likeness of God, as temples of the Holy Spirit, but also as people who sin and need God's forgiveness.

My brothers and sisters, this new way of seeing will lead us to live in new ways. We will love as Christ loved; we will love God first and our neighbor as ourselves; we will treat others as we want to be treated and not treat others as we would not want to be treated. We will make our own and live the attitudes and values of God and Christ, working for peace and justice for all people. We will strive to be the-best-version-of-ourselves. We will recognize and respond to God's call in our lives to serve him by serving others, especially those in need. We will respect and cherish all human life from conception to natural death. We will be joyful, optimistic, and life-giving; in other words, we will be people of hope in the midst of the coronavirus.