

2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Advent - C  
Baruch 5:1-9;  
Philippians 1:4-6, 8-11;  
Luke 3:1-6  
Little Flower - 12/5/21

My Brothers and Sisters,

Today's Gospel introduces John the Baptist. Jesus said that "*among those born of women there has been none greater than John the Baptist*" [Mt. 11:11]. Therefore, it is good to review what we know about John the Baptist.

Since his mother Elizabeth was Mary's cousin, Jesus and John the Baptist were also cousins. According to the Gospels, John's birth was a miraculous birth. Throughout the Old Testament, there were many miraculous births, mostly to overage and sterile women. Each of them was seen as a sign of God's presence, power, and favor in our world. Each of those born miraculously had a special part to play in God's plan of salvation.

John the Baptist had a unique role in salvation history. He 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. More importantly, he was the fulfillment of the words of the prophet Isaiah: "*A voice of one crying out in the desert: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths.'*"

Because he announced the impending arrival of the Lord, 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 at last 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].

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...*" In other words, John the Baptist calls us to conversion. Although conversion can mean different things, conversion in the Gospels is radical. *Metanoia* or conversion implies turning our lives around, i.e., changing the direction of our lives. It means turning away from selfishness and sin and turning outward toward God and others. The root of *metanoia* also implies seeing in new ways.

Last week I proposed three Advent resolutions to us as a parish. This week I want to issue an invitation to conversion. As I have reflected on the last couple of years, I have come to the conclusion that the pandemic has profoundly affected all of us. For most of us, most of that effect has been negative. I also believe that many, if not most, of us are not even aware of all the ways the pandemic has affected us negatively. To give just one personal example, I really do not make nearly as much effort to see friends or family as I should or as I did pre-pandemic. I am quite content not to go out. Therefore, I am suggesting that during Advent we try our best to understand the ways the pandemic has impacted us negatively and then do our best to turn ourselves around in those areas of our life. If we do this, I believe we will be able to welcome Christ anew within our lives and hearts this Christmas.

My brothers and sisters, each of our readings today offers an insight into the meaning of Christ's coming. The book of Baruch was written during the Babylonian Exile. God promised to bring his people home. Christ came to reconcile us with God and one another, in other words, to bring us 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. During Advent, we want to create a straight highway for Jesus into our lives and hearts. On Christmas, we want to celebrate not only Jesus' birth two thousand years ago but his rebirth within us.