

FR. JOHN'S HOMILY

Second Sunday of Advent, December 5, 2020

This time of Advent helps us to center our lives upon God. It is a time for us to make sure that our lives, and everything about our lives, is centered upon God. In doing so, Advent can also help us find ways to strengthen our faith. During the first two Sundays of Advent the prayer of the church, the closing prayer after communion while we have Jesus within us, states: “teach us to judge wisely the things of earth, and hold firm to the things of heaven.” Judging wisely the things of earth allows us to hold fast and firm to the things of eternity.

Having an Advent spirit or an Advent heart, means to listen more attentively to God and His words. Advent is a time to be still, and to allow God’s word to enter more deeply within. It’s more difficult in normal times but now, as we find ourselves in times of isolation, it provides more opportunities to have quiet time. What better way for us to prepare the way of the Lord in our lives and in our hearts?

The first reading today is from the Prophet Isaiah. We have to understand this word was originally aimed at the Jewish people who had been taken out of their own land and were living in a foreign land without much freedom to celebrate their own faith. These people longed for and hoped for a time to return to their own land and to rebuild the temple of the Lord, so they could worship freely. I have mentioned this before; they were a people of waiting.

This can be a parallel to our own lives today. We too are a people of waiting. There is something good and right about waiting on the Lord. We, too, can find ourselves in exile from the Lord because of our sins and the sins of our ancestors, the sins of our family. Pope Francis even mentions the isolation due to sin is a greater Isolation than the Pandemic brings. Not everyone today wants to turn to the Lord, because it means we have to make some changes. The Lord does have demands, but these demands of self-denial, repentance, making amends are for our good and the good of all. They are not like the demands the world, family, jobs, or others place upon us. Demands of God, if we are willing, means greater freedom for ourselves. The words of the Prophet Isaiah can be addressed to us if we long to live according to the Word of the Lord and recognize that we cannot do any changing for the better without the grace and mercy of God.

This pursuit of God we can do on our own. But it will end up in failure. So we see how we can relate to the Israelites and find consolation in the words: “Comfort, give comfort to my people! Every valley shall be filled in, every mountain and hill shall be made low; the rugged land shall be made a plain, the rough country, a broad valley. Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed.” This is all about a people recognizing their need for God, to be humble, repent, and make our hearts ready for the outpouring of God’s grace.

When we are seeking the Lord, these words of Isaiah can bring joy to our hearts, as we open ourselves more to the presence of the Living God. In this seeking we know the truth that God is always seeking after us, His people. Yes, our seeking Him has been

placed in us from God Himself, like the Hillsong United song, *Relentless*. The song began with the group realizing this song was a work in progress, and eventually the verse came to them that began a life of its own. It is about the outrageous pursuing of God's love. You can't comprehend it; we must learn to surrender to Him. Can you accept this outrageous love of God? It sounds simple, but can your heart accept it?

Like *Relentless*, an 18th century poem of Francis Thompson, the *Hound of Heaven*, refers to God's relentless love of one who is always fleeing and running away. As the hound follows the hare, never ceasing in its running, ever drawing closer to the chase. God follows the fleeing soul by His own Divine Grace. And this chase continues to go on until the soul finally realizes and gives in to God's overwhelming pursuing love. This Advent is about giving in to God's love.

The Second Letter of Peter, repeats this lesson to us: "The Lord does not delay his promise, as some regard 'delay,' but he is patient with you, not wishing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance." There it is, that all will come to Him. It is God Himself who wants to give us comfort, but God can only do so insofar as our hearts are open and waiting for Him. It is God who invites us to be patient and who reminds us: "Beloved, since you await these things, be eager to be found without spot or blemish before him, at peace."

Advent is a time to stir up our desire for God, to stir up our hope in the Lord, to deepen our awareness of His love for us. And hopefully accepting His love that we find in our Savior Jesus whom we are preparing for always, especially this Christmas of 2020.

Just to help us along our faith journey this advent, the Gospel of Mark today gives us the account of this great prophet, John the Baptist. In Mark's version, he doesn't say much, he gets right to the point. John is a man seeking the Lord with all his strength. Mark recognizes that John the Baptist is the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecy that speaks of the one who will go before the Lord to prepare His way. And John is so completely humbled by his task that he sees himself even unworthy to untie the thongs of the sandals of the Lord who comes. Everything in and about John the Baptist points to the One who Is to Come, the Savior, the Messiah. Who he is, what he wears, what he eats, where he lives, what he says, how he conducts his life, all points to Jesus. John is an Advent figure that teaches us how to center our lives on God.

May our lives become so focused on God and His ways, that we become like John the Baptist: our lives only giving witness to God. And each in our own way drawing others to a greater faith. Advent is a time to prepare our hearts for the greatest love of all. As we pray as a church, "teach us to judge wisely the things of earth, and hold firm to the things of heaven." We pray this as we are one with Jesus in Communion.