

HOMILY FOR ADVENT II – DECEMBER 6th 2020

Today is the Second Sunday in Advent. Last Sunday, we were told to watch – to watch for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to pray earnestly.

Today the focus switches to St. Mark's reflection on the prophecy of Isaiah at the start of his Gospel and the ministry of John the Baptist, with his call for repentance of sins, to cleanse ourselves of what we may have done in our past, to check the present and look forward to the future.

St. Mark quoting, as he tells us, from Isaiah the prophet says: "I send my messenger before you to prepare the way; a herald's voice in the desert crying, "Make ready the way of the Lord, clear for Him a straight path...."

It was under this banner that John the Baptist appeared in the desert, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sin, saying: "After me comes He who is mightier than I, the thong of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I have baptised you with water; He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit...."

The Church points to John the Baptist at this Advent time because he is a reminder of the spirit of his time. John was the one who prepared the way for the coming of the Saviour and his cry...."Make ready the way of the Lord, clear him a straight path. After me comes He who is mightier than I..."

This part of John the Baptist's life features waiting, watching and preparation he undertook for his life's work. He left his home; went into the desert, fasted and prayed to God for guidance in his future role.

The spiritual masters speak of the desert as an experience that is not only a physical separation from people, it is a preparation for the life ahead. This was the experience of John; of our Lord Himself and the ministry of many other saints.

This desert we face may be a struggle against heavy odds; it may be a crisis in which we are utterly alone; it may be a darkness of the soul when God seems far away..... The ways in which God forges us are complex and mysterious.

When John came out of the desert and began to preach, his theme wasn't intellectual, it was basic and easy to understand. His message was simple and to the point: "Reform your lives! The reign of God is at hand..."

Soon after Jesus entered public life, some of John the Baptist's disciples left him to follow our Lord. Many of John's followers complained about this, but John's answer was that after him came someone who was mightier than he, the thong of whose sandal he wasn't worthy enough to untie,

Humility has nothing to do with weakness or with cowardice. If a person is really humble, they are centred on God and never a slave to the mood of the time. Those people who think in terms of true or false, right and wrong are strong within - just as John illustrates.

As we approach the anniversary of Christ's birth, John the Baptist tells us to take stock. He teaches us to live by faith, so that when we have to face problems in our lives, we will continue to be faithful and strong.

Spiritual experience is to walk by faith, to often pass into darkness, just like John the Baptist, and to know what it is to cry out to God: "please give me the strength to do and accept your will."

St. Peter reminds us this morning from his second letter that we wait for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells and tells us: "since we wait for these things be zealous and be found by God to be without spot or blemish and at peace..."

If there are moments when God gives us fleeting glimpses of the world to come, giving us spiritual insights, this is a grace that should be treasured.

Sometimes we may feel that God has forgotten us and left us utterly alone. In fact, John must have felt this way at times, but our Lord was always with him even in the darkest hour. John should be our example as we travel farther along the road of Advent.

WE must not lose hope but realise that our personal desert can be the place where new life can be found and a new creation begin. Confessing our sins we can prepare to encounter the one whom John the Baptist refers, and the power and gentleness of whose holy spirit can speak tenderly to us, calling us to journey with him to a deeper meaning and fullness of freedom.

Jesus called John the Baptist “the greatest” and the Church holds him up before us at this time. The Holy Spirit makes it clear that this was the one man who, in his own life, displayed and made manifest all those elements which really mean greatness of soul.

Let us place before us the image of John the Baptist and his call for repentance as we enter more fully into this season of Advent, the forthcoming anniversary of our Lord’s birth and His promise to us that he will come again.