Second Sunday of Advent (A)

Gospel text (*Mt* 3:1-12): John the Baptist appeared, preaching in the desert of Judea and saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!” It was of him that the prophet Isaiah had spoken when he said: “A voice of one crying out in the desert, ‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths.’” John wore clothing made of camel’s hair and had a leather belt around his waist. His food was locusts and wild honey. At that time Jerusalem, all Judea, and the whole region around the Jordan were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the Jordan River as they acknowledged their sins.

When he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Produce good fruit as evidence of your repentance. And do not presume to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ For I tell you, God can raise up children to Abraham from these stones. Even now the ax lies at the root of the trees. Therefore every tree that does not bear good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire. I am baptizing you with water, for repentance, but the one who is coming after me is mightier than I. I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fan is in his hand. He will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into his barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.”

“Produce good fruit as evidence of your repentance”

Fr. Walter Hugo PERELLÓ
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Today, the Gospel of Saint Matthew presents John the Baptist inviting us to conversion: “Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand” (Mt 3:2).

Many people were coming to him to be baptized, “confessing their sins” (Mt 3:6). But among that great crowd, John fixes his gaze on a particular group — the Pharisees and Sadducees — as much in need of conversion as they were stubborn in denying it. To them the Baptist directs these words: “Produce good fruit as evidence of your repentance’’ (Mt 3:8).

As we begin the season of Advent, a time of joyful expectation, we encounter John's exhortation, which helps us understand that this waiting is not "quietism," nor the presumption that we are already saved simply because we are Christians. This waiting is a dynamic search for God's mercy; it is conversion of heart; it is the longing for the presence of the Lord who came, who comes, and who will come again.

Advent, in the end, is "a conversion that moves from the heart to works and, consequently, to the entire life of the Christian'' (Saint John Paul II).

Let us take advantage, brothers and sisters, of this favorable time the Lord gives us to renew our choice for Jesus Christ, removing from our hearts and our lives anything that would prevent us from receiving Him worthily. The voice of the Baptist continues to echo in the desert of our own day: "Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight His paths'' (Mt 3:3).

And just as John was in his time that "voice crying out in the wilderness," so we Christians are invited by the Lord to be voices that proclaim to humanity the longing of a vigilant expectation: "The coming of our God, our thoughts must now employ: then let us meet him on the road. with songs of holy joy. The co-eternal Son, a maiden's offspring see: a servant's form Christ putteth on, to make his people free." (Hymn of Advent, The Liturgy of the Hours).

Thoughts on Today's Gospel

- "If you have confessed at the call of Christ the bars will be broken, and every chain loosed, even the stench of the bodily corruption be grievous." (St Ambrose)

- "John the Baptist preaches upright faith and good works so that the force of grace may penetrate, the light of the truth shine out, the paths to God be straightened. The Precursor of Jesus is like a star that heralds the rising of the Sun, of Christ." (Benedict XVI)

- "'Prophet of the Most High' (Lk 1:76), St. John the Baptist surpasses all the prophets, of whom he is the last. He inaugurates the Gospel, already from his mother's womb welcomes the coming of Christ, and rejoices in being 'the friend of the bridegroom' (Jn 3:29), whom he points out as 'the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world' (Jn 1:29)..." (Catechism Of The Catholic Church Nº 523)