Second Sunday of Advent (B)

Gospel text (*Mk* 1:1-8): The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ the Son of God. As it is written in Isaiah the prophet: Behold, I am sending my messenger ahead of you; he will prepare your way. A voice of one crying out in the desert: “Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths.”

John the Baptist appeared in the desert proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. People of the whole Judean countryside and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the Jordan River as they acknowledged their sins.

John was clothed in camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist. He fed on locusts and wild honey. And this is what he proclaimed: “One mightier than I is coming after me. I am not worthy to stoop and loosen the thongs of his sandals. I have baptized you with water; he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”

“John the Baptist appeared in the desert proclaiming a baptism of repentance”

Fr. Faust BAILO
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Today, as the curtain of the divine drama rises, we can already hear someone shouting: “Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths” (Mk 1,3). Today we meet John the Baptist as he sets the stage for Jesus' coming.

Some people thought John himself was the Messiah. He spoke like the prophets of old, saying that people must turn from sin to avoid punishment, and turn to God to experience his mercy. But this is a message for all times and places and John spoke it with particular urgency. So, a stream of people, from Jerusalem and from all over Judea, flowed into the wilderness to hear John preach.

Why did John attract so many men and women? Sure, he blasted Herod and the religious leaders, a daring act that fascinated the common people. But he also had strong words for the people as well: they too were sinners and needed to repent. And when they confessed their sins, he baptized them in the Jordan River. Hence, John the Baptist captivated them because they understood the message of true repentance

he was trying to convey. A repentance that was more than just confession of sin —in itself a long step forward and a beautiful one indeed! But repentance based on the belief that only God can both forgive and erase, both settle the debt and clear away the debris of our souls, straighten up our crooked ways.

“Do not waste this time of mercy offered by God”, Saint Gregory the Great says. Do not waste this time of embracing the purifying love offered to us, we can say to ourselves as the time of Advent unfolds before us.

Are we ready to straighten the paths for our Lord this Advent? Could we make this the time for a truer, more searching confession in our lives? John called for sincerity —sincerity with oneself— and abandonment to God's mercy. In doing so he helped people to live for God, to understand that living is a matter of fighting to open up the paths of virtue and letting God's grace vivify their soul with his joy.

Thoughts on Today's Gospel

- “We know that there are three comings of the Lord. The third lies between the other two. This intermediate coming is like a road on which we travel from the first coming to the last. In the first coming, Christ was our redemption; in the last, he will appear as our life; in this middle coming, he is our rest and our comfort.” (St Bernard)

- “One of the essential and qualifying features of God is that He is the God-who-comes. He is not a God who is there in Heaven, unconcerned with us and our history, but he is the-God-who-comes. He is a Father who never stops thinking of us.” (Benedict XVI)

- “Finally, with John the Baptist, the Holy Spirit begins the restoration to man of ‘the divine likeness,’ prefiguring what he would achieve with and in Christ. John's baptism was for repentance; baptism in water and the Spirit will be a new birth.” (Catechism of the Catholic Church Nº 720)