

HOMILY ADVENT SUNDAY 2-A (Homily 02)

“Let All Come to Repentance”

(Isaiah 40:1-5, 9-11; Psalm 85; 2 Peter 3:6-15; Mark 1:1-8)

The theme of repentance, forgiveness and reconciliation runs through all the readings of today’s celebration. In the first reading, Isaiah speaks words of comfort after a time of tribulation and punishment for sin. He reassures the people, whom we have to assume have repented of their past sins, that they are truly forgiven by God. Isaiah’s is a call to us to prepare the way of the Lord through humble honesty and repentance, for God will come with loving compassion and care for God’s people, as God did in the time of Isaiah.

In the Gospel, John the Baptist proclaims repentance for the forgiveness of sins. He announces one whose baptism, unlike his, will truly reach the heart of people and bring about transformation and change. John’s baptism could only name and identify sin; not take it away. John’s baptism could only call people to repentance, not give them the gift of repentance. John’s baptism could speak about forgiveness and reconciliation; he could not forgive nor reconcile anyone. That power belonged to the one whose coming he was announcing. The baptism of John was like paper put in water; there was a change but superficial. The baptism of Jesus would be like paper put into fire; there would be transformation, not just change.

St. Peter in the second reading reminds us that God wants all to come to repentance. There will be a new heaven and a new earth where righteousness will be at home. The message simply deepens – we must repent, receive forgiveness and strive to be righteous and holy, as God is holy.

Biblically, the word that is used for repentance in Greek is *metanoia*. That word is derived from the word *meta* which means higher, loftier, above or better, like metaphysics, and *nous*, which means mind or thoughts. The Greeks believed that each of us has a higher mind, and a lower mind. Our lower mind is like a basement where we would keep our castaways, our junk. It is in that lower mind that we would store our negative thoughts and attitudes. To repent, then, is to let go of that kind of junk in our lives, and try to live out of our higher, nobler minds.

These readings inviting us to come to repentance are certainly appropriate for the second Sunday of Advent, a season that invites us to joyfully prepare for a deeper coming of Jesus into our lives today, as well as for the celebration of his birth among us two thousand years ago.

It is interesting that even in the secular world, this message to repent, to forgive, to be reconciled, can resonate. An example is the *Returning To Spirit* program that is spreading around western Canada at the moment. This program puts both aboriginal and non-aboriginal people through a seven day process of looking at the hurt in their lives, the stories that were built up around that hurt, stories that hide their true spirit, and teaches them to move beyond that hurt into a new future through forgiveness. It then brings the two groups together for three days of dialogue and face-to-face reconciliation that leads the participants to new life.

One young man struggled with resentment towards his father, who was too busy for him as he grew up. For over fifteen years he reacted by trying to change his father, arguing with him and trying to convince his father that he was wrong. One day, almost accidentally, he caught himself criticizing the cooking of the chef in the residence where he was staying. Suddenly it was like his eyes were opened, and he realized that he had become just like his father, who was very critical. For some reason, he intuited that if he was acting like his father, perhaps he was also feeling like his father. Suddenly, for the first time in his life, he understood his father – a 78 year old man who was full of the painful emotions that he himself was feeling. That awareness and understanding was the moment that he forgave his father. Fifteen years of resentment melted away instantaneously. He drove home that Sunday, met with his father, and apologized to him for the way he had treated him for all those years. Amazingly, his father changed overnight. They were reconciled, and he had two good years with his father before his father passed away at the age of 80. He was able to truly celebrate his father's funeral because he knew that he and his father had repented, forgiven each other, and become reconciled.

The Eucharist that we celebrate now is an experience of forgiveness, healing and reconciliation in our lives, through the power of God's Word, receiving the Body and Blood of Jesus, and worshipping together as one community of faith.

May this celebration, and this season of Advent, continue calling us to come to repentance, healing and reconciliation in our lives, that we might be able to celebrate Christmas as an event that marks an even deeper experience of the love of God through Jesus Christ in our lives today.