

Connecting With the Sunday Readings

Second Sunday of Advent

We are not surprised by this Sunday's Gospel reading. What would Advent be without the mention of John the Baptist? He is like the one at the head of the parade announcing that something very important is coming. For Christmas parades, it's Santa. For Christian parades, it's Jesus. So get ready and be sure to stay around. You won't be disappointed.

But John also has a purpose: to guide us. He says getting ready means we must repent. The actual word in the original Greek is *metanoia*. Many of us have heard this word before. It means to "turn around" or "change yourself." It also implies an interior change. It's helpful to think of this as a change in attitude, mindset, or behavior. So what does that mean in relationship to the Second Coming of Jesus? Basically it means "cleaning house."

A Gospel Word for the Home

Luke 3:1-6

We're not referring to the space where we live unless we speak of this as an analogy. John is referring to an interior "cleaning up." If we get rid of the right kinds of things within us, we'll be able to accept the full reality of the coming of Christ. So what exactly needs to go to the dump? Perhaps it is the way we hold onto our successes and failures; the way we build up our egos; the way we rule out any need for other people in our lives; the way we want more than we need and go after it, whether it is money or material goods. In a sense, we empty ourselves so that Christ may grow in us.

Mostly, it's about forgiveness. We often blame others. We dwell resentfully on those who have wronged or hurt us. As long as we consider ourselves better than others, we miss out on loving relationships. Being forgiven by God implies that we forgive others. Every time we say the Our Father, we say, "yes, we will do this." But it's not easy at all. To be washed in Baptism is not only to be forgiven by God, but it also means that we are given the power to forgive others. When we forgive others, the path to God is made straight; the ups and downs of traveling through valleys of bitterness and resentment and over hills of selfishness and arrogance will be smoothed out. In that sense, Advent is a time for us to forgive so that the abundance of God's forgiveness and peace will be ours at Christmas.

Thought for the Week

Who do we hold in the prison of our own inner being? Who do we say that we will never forgive? Take an account of these matters. And don't forget to include yourself. Sometimes we are our own worst enemies. We pile up words and deeds that we judge have been done deliberately to hurt us. Anger simmers just under the surface of our lives. And we do not mind because it allows us to judge ourselves better than others. Human history has often been dominated by those who think that they are better than others, and at times, they have tried to hurt, limit, or even eradicate those whom they thought were more important than them. John came to urge people to repent and change their behaviors and attitudes.

Parent Survival

Many times over the course of our reflections of the Gospels, we point out various ways to find peace within. Burnout is rooted in frustration, depression, and anger. Being a parent is never easy. Children can be a great source of parental angst and complaint. It's unavoidable. But we can let their shortcomings and mistakes "get to us" in ways that prevent us from feeling that life remains saturated with God's love. We can so easily feel despair. A lot of that happens because family members will not let go of hurts—real or imaginary. We can exaggerate them; boil with anger and be aggressive; we can give each other the silent treatment. Forgiveness of others is never easy, but it is so important for the well-being and happiness of the family. Repentance is not just about mending our ways or doing better each day. It is about something inside us. It is moving from a sense of fairness (important as that is) to one of love and forgiveness. Some have criticized any religion that puts love first as being wishy-washy. Not so. True Christian love is hard. It is difficult to let go of our judgments of others, to allow others to be who they are, to accept that even our enemies are children of God.

Car or Meal Talk

Advent is a good time to discuss what it means to forgive another person. In the quiet of their hearts have family members choose one person who has hurt them and pray for the willingness to forgive him or her.

One-Line Prayer

God of mercy and forgiveness, give us forgiving hearts. Amen.