

## 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Advent

On the one hand, salvation is God's doing, and we cannot earn His blessings. We are saved by His grace. On the other hand, we must cooperate with God's grace because God cannot force his reward upon us. That is why John the Baptist in today's Gospel advises us to play our essential part by leading lives of repentance, conversion and renewal, thus preparing the way for the Lord's second coming. We start this process by spiritually preparing for the celebration of Christmas, the Lord's first coming by reforming and renewing our lives by repentance and works of charity.

*We need to prepare for Christ's coming by allowing him to be reborn daily in our lives:* Advent is the time for us to make a preparation by repenting of our sins and renewing our lives through prayer, penance, and the sharing of our blessings with others. Let us remember often the repeated words of Pope Alexander: "What does it profit me if Jesus is reborn in thousands of cribs all over the world and not reborn in my heart?" He means that Jesus must be reborn in our heart during this season of Advent and every day of our lives, radiating his love, kindness, mercy, forgiveness and spirit of humble service to the world through our lives.

*We need to answer the call for a change of life:* John the Baptist challenges our superficial attempts at change, demanding that, while obeying the commandments faithfully, we must correct our relationships with others, mend breaks and frictions, face family responsibilities, work honestly and treat employees justly. Let us share our love with others as selfless and humble service. St. Theresa of Lisieux and St. Teresa of Calcutta (Mother Teresa) say, "Do small things but with great love".

*Call to repentance:* John's message was not comforting. It cut into the very hearts of people. *Metánoia* is the Greek word for *repentance*, it literally means, "to change one's mind and heart," a change of direction or a U-turn. Repentance involves turning around –

facing in a new direction - with a change of heart and a new commitment. Repentance is a daily experience that renews our Baptism. Repentance for us is not a one-time action but must take place daily, because preparing for the Lord is a perpetual task.

Today's second reading recommends patience and this is the season of patient waiting for the Lord to come. This reading reminds us to wait patiently for the coming of the Lord.

*Waiting for the Lord to be reborn in our lives:* Waiting is inevitable and necessary aspect of human life, is not something that most of us enjoy. We *wait* in lines: in order to purchase groceries; to be served at popular restaurants; to be assisted in a bank; at stop signs and traffic signals; at amusement parks; to see a play or film. We must also *wait* for flowers to grow and bloom; for babies to be born; for wounds to heal; for bread to rise and cheese to age; for children to mature; for friends to call; for love to deepen. Statisticians have estimated that in a lifetime of 70 years, the average person spends at least three years waiting! Today's readings invite us to wait for the rebirth of the Lord in our lives with repentant hearts and renewed lives.

The coming of Kingdom was John's main theme. The Kingdom of God is a God-centered, God-controlled life. John wanted people to experience such a life. Everyone who wants to experience this "*reign of God*" needs to make a radical change in his or her life. That is the call for repentance. We cannot come under the rule of God without a change of attitude, a change of heart and a change of lifestyle.

Today's readings remind us that the Advent is the acceptable time for repentance and the acceptance of God's pardon and renewal of life.

In short, John's message was a call for radical conversion, a demand for self-denial, sacrifice and loving service to others.