

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

The season of Advent heralds the coming of Emmanuel, “God with us”. It is the time, we realize, when our God comes to the earth to take on human form, and live on earth just as we live. He does it, as he shares his life and love with us. When God shares his love with us, he invites us to share our love with Him and with others. Advent is the time of waiting, as we prepare ourselves to welcome the God who became man and who, by example, showed us how we, too, should be able to live like him for others. Advent means waiting. We wait for someone, we love and we long to meet that person.

The preaching of John the Baptist, which echoed and re-echoed around the river Jordan, in ring a joyful tone around us today also. John’s mission was to preach repentance, to get the people to turn back to God, and it was customary among the Jews to go through the external rites of washing to represent internal cleansing of the heart. The place Jordan was suitable and symbolic of the repentance of the chosen people of God. He was preparing the people to receive the chosen one of God.

We are preparing ourselves to receive Christ at Christmas and the prophet tells us how we should prepare ourselves if the welcome we give our Savior is to be sincere and true. Even the best and the holiest among us have to admit that our paths, namely our dealings with God, have to be smooth and straight. When a king or a person of high rank was to visit another king or the dignitary, the host sent his slaves to level the paths and smooth the roads for the guest’s camels. Similarly, it is necessary for people to prepare their minds and smooth their consciences by wiping away all that can be offensive to God. Such a preparation would be a good way to welcome the coming of the Messiah.

In his mission, John remains humble, and when Jesus came to him, in order to be baptized by him, John seems to object at first: “Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan, to be baptized by John. John would have prevented him, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?” But Jesus answered him, “Let it be so now; for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness”. Then he consented.” (Mt. 3:13-15) John remains humble in his

mission: if the love of God is in him, it does not belong to him to show it to anyone, even at this supreme moment when he is called to baptize He who is Love in person.

To receive the grace of God in humility: that is how, one prepares for the coming of the Son of God! The Virgin Mary did this until the much-awaited day, when the Word of God became incarnate in her. In the early church, it indicated the working of the community in harmony to build the new spirit in the community. Today, the grace of God is still offered to us, particularly in the Eucharist, where we receive within us, the very author of grace.

The Gospel reminds us that our own role is not unlike that of John the Baptist. Like him, each one of us has a mission to communicate the Spirit of Christ and his message of hope, love, freedom and peace to others. To help people, fill their valleys and make their rough paths smoother. A word of affirmation and encouragement can work wonders. To have a naturally cheerful disposition can be a real witness of Christian joy. John heard the word of God in the desert. Our cities and towns are often such busy places and our lives are often so hectic. We really do need some quiet place so that we can hear God speaking to us. Some have the custom of going once a year, for a retreat that is excellent. But there are other times, too, when we need simply to stop doing everything, cut out all noise and listen to ourselves and to our God.

Christmas is the commemoration of the greatest gift of the mercy of God, bestowed on this world. The feast invites us to turn ourselves to God in gratitude and repentance and experience his abounding mercy. Christ will come to us with the salvation of God and we can confidently hope to live the coming year with gratitude to our Father in heaven. During the course of this week, let us reflect upon our spiritual ancestors, our saintly brothers and sisters, who have gone out from Jerusalem, so we may share in the joy of the Gospel of Christ. Let us reflect upon their message, which has become our message. Let us prepare ourselves to celebrate the past coming of the Lord that is commemorated on Christmas Day. Let us constantly pray for each other with joy in every one of our prayers. Through our participation in the sharing of the Gospel as instruments of the Holy Spirit, let us be confident that He will bring the good works of Christ to its completion before the final coming of the Lord at the end of the world.