

Homily Notes for Sunday December 9 2018 Advent 2 C

Readings: Baruch 5:1-9; Philippians 1:4-6, 8-11; Luke 3:1-6

1. Summary: The second and third Sundays of Advent invite us to clean up our lives, to make straight and direct our relationship with God through repentance. Today we are challenged to appreciate the power of repentance both to improve our personal lives and our relations in this life as well as to prepare to meet him as our judge on his *Second Coming*.

2. Scripture lessons: Preparing the way back to God. **In the first reading**, the prophet Baruch introduces Yahweh, the God of Israel, preparing the way for, and leading the Babylonian exiles to, Jerusalem. Baruch's words are very similar to those of Isaiah in Isa 40:3ff. The exiles are called on to prepare the way to return to the Lord. We, too, are asked to prepare the way for our return to the Lord from our slavery to sin.

3. In the second reading Paul advises the Philippian community members to prepare themselves for Christ's Second Coming, referring to it as "*the day of Christ*" They are to do this by growing in Christian love "in knowledge and every kind of perception, discerning what is of real value, in order to lead pure and blameless lives." "Pure" means to be tested by the very light of the sun. "Blameless" means not leading into sin or being led into sin. Being "blameless" involves avoiding the "near occasions of sin." The passage stresses everyone's need for that perpetual readiness to be found in leading a godly life.

4. Paul could be very positive about their spiritual future because of their spiritual progress and maturity. So he assured them that their Heavenly Father, who had given them the gift of conversion, would continue to bring that "good work" to fruition. God would complete His work "*at the day of Jesus Christ,*" when Jesus would come in glory to judge the whole world, provided that the Philippians had done their part by "*approving what is excellent*" and remaining "*pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruits of righteousness.*" Paul's advice echoes the words of John the Baptist found in today's Gospel.

5. The three sources of danger. This reminds us of the need to be constantly alert and on guard against dangers that may come from the world (external society), from the flesh (within), or from the Devil (supernatural evil). Hence, we submit ourselves to prudent limitations and disciplines in order to avoid "the near occasions of sin."

6. John the Baptist, in today's gospel, challenges the Jews to prepare their lives for receiving their long-awaited Messiah. They are to get ready by repenting of their sins, renewing their lives, and expressing their repentance by receiving the baptism of repentance in River Jordan.

7. Theme of John's preaching: the baptism of repentance: John's baptism was not a proselyte baptism, converting Gentiles into Jews. Instead, it was a baptism within the community of faith, for the forgiveness of sins, and it required repentance (*metanoeo*, a change of being), which implied a turning around to proceed in a new direction. Baptism itself is a purification ritual, and John was inviting people to be purified of the unholy elements in their lives. Quoting the prophet Isaiah (Isa 40:3-5), John the Baptist declared, "*Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth*" (Lk 3:5). If a king were planning to travel, work crews would be dispatched to repair the roads. Ideally, the roads for the king's journey would be straight, level, and

smooth. John considered himself as the courier of the king. **But the preparation on which he insisted was a preparation of heart and of life.** "The king is coming," he said in effect. "Mend, not your roads, but your lives."

8. Just how important is repentance to the Gospel? Jesus called for it in his first words of his preaching: "After John had been arrested, Jesus came to Galilee preaching the Gospel of God: "This is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the Gospel." (Mark 1:12-15, see also Mk 6:12, Lk 13:3). Peter in his first preaching called on believers to repent (See Acts 2:38 and 3:19).

9. Just what is involved in repentance? It is not just confessing sins or admitting that we had done them. It involves both a change of mind and a change of behavior. St Paul in Acts 26:19ff makes very clear the steps of true repentance:

"Consequently, King Agrippa, I did not prove disobedient to the heavenly vision, but kept declaring both to those of Damascus first, and also at Jerusalem and then throughout all the region of Judea, and even to the Gentiles, that they should repent (metanoia – change of mind) and turn to God (actual change of behavior and direction), performing deeds appropriate to repentance" John said clearly, "Produce good fruits as evidence of your repentance" (v.8).

10. Life messages: We need to prepare our hearts and lives for Jesus our savior to be reborn in us during this Christmas time. We have to fill in the "valleys" of our souls, formed from our shallow prayer life and a minimalist way of living our faith. We have to straighten out whatever crooked paths we've been walking, like involvement in some secret or habitual sins or in a sinful relationship. If we have been involved in some dishonest practices at work, at home, or in personal relationships, we are called to straighten them out and make an apology or restitution. If we have been harboring grudges or hatred, or failing to be reconciled with others, now is the time to clear away all the debris. As individuals, we might have to overcome deep-seated resentment, persistent fault-finding, unwillingness to forgive, dishonesty in our dealings with others, or a bullying attitude. And we all have to level the "mountains" of our pride and egocentrism by practicing true humility rendering humble service to others.

11. Question: What are the resolutions and changes we need to make in our lives this Advent in order to bring our lives more in line with what God wants of us? Make a *good* confession this Advent. We can use all of Advent to prepare us for our resolutions of New Year.

12. Joke of the week: "Oh, well, soap only works when it is applied." A soap manufacturer and a pastor were walking together down a street in a large city. The soap manufacturer casually said, "The gospel you preach hasn't done much good, has it? Just observe. There is still a lot of wickedness in the world, and a lot of wicked people, too!" The pastor made no reply until they passed a dirty little child making mud pies in the gutter. Seizing the opportunity, the pastor said, "I see that soap hasn't done much good in the world either; for there is much dirt still here, and many dirty people are still around." The soap man said, "Oh, well, soap only works when it is applied." And the pastor said, "Exactly! So it is with the gospel."