

SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT; Cycle – A; Dec. 4th 2022
Isaiah 11:1-10; Romans 15:4-9; Matthew 3:1-12

Dear Sisters & Brothers,

These days wherever we go, we see the signs of the forthcoming Christmas celebration. Despite the heavy secularization of this great season, it is nice to hear some Christmas music in the malls and shops, though it is a business tactic. This is the season fully enjoyed by the young and the old. But last Sunday we didn't have something positive in the Word of God to add to this joy, other than the warning of Jesus against his Second Coming. This Sunday in the gospel we have a great figure, John the Baptist, preaching harshly and posing a big challenge of **repentance and conversion before the Jews**. But his audience seems to be keen and happy to listen to him and they came to him to be baptized.

When we understand the context in which John the Baptist appeared in the scene, we will come to know why people were so much enthusiastic to hear him. In the Promised Land God sent the Prophets to Israel very regularly as people became unfaithful to Him. As their infidelity mounted up God stopped sending the Prophets and let the people go into exile. Thus before John appeared on the scene 400 years passed without a Prophet preaching in Israel. His appearance was the materialization of their long cherished dream.

Finally, as the fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah the great Prophet, John the Baptist came as “**A voice of one crying out in the desert, prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths.**” For the coming of the Savior was immediate. His sole mission was to prepare the hearts of the people to welcome the Messiah. John's appearance was an assurance for Israel that God has not forgotten them. While people of Israel were wandering in the desert God was very close to them and He spoke to them directly. The people also were rather faithful to God. The reason why John started his ministry in the desert was, to give the people once again the desert experience of their ancestors who heard God personally. And also John wanted to correct the pride of the scribes and Pharisees who believed that as they were the descendants of Abraham, eternal life was guaranteed to them. Through his fiery discourse in today's gospel John is refuting this wrong notion. In other words John makes it very clear that due to the merits of Abraham, their Father, the present sinful generation would not be entitled to have eternal salvation, **unless and until they repent for their sins and go for a true conversion.**

In John's preaching we notice one basic demand – **“Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!”** The similar demand we hear in Jesus' preaching too especially at the beginning of his ministry – **“Repent and believe in the gospel” (Mk 1:15)**. Both John and Jesus use the word *‘Repent’* without further explanation or interpretation. It means the people really understood the real meaning of repentance. Though many scribes and Pharisees looked forward to have a free ticket to heaven, in the teaching of the Rabbis repentance was the key point to all religious faith and all relationship with God. We have quite a few of Psalms expressing the repentance of the penitents. According to John and Jesus the true repentance should lead the person to a **total conversion**. In the words of St. Paul it is nothing but **stripping off the old man** and wearing the new man. In Greek it is called *‘metanoia’* which means total conversion of mind.

The worst sin of the modern age is that it lost the sense of sin. These days many don't feel that they have any need of conversion of heart. For, they don't see any sin in them. *Very often, people keep the good feeling, “I am not a bad person and so and so should change, not I.”* In fact, if we look into our lives critically, we know that there are many areas in our lives which need changes; very often our attitudes towards God and our neighbors need a change. Once we feel self-righteous like the scribes and Pharisees, there is no room for change in our lives; we always feel perfect. Of course, to change something in life is the most difficult step we can take.

These days many Christians too keep the false notion that as baptized Christians, eternal life is guaranteed to them. But Jesus warns such people: **“Not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven” (Mt 7:21)**. Yet there are many people in the modern age who have the pride in the hearts that what will happen if I have sinned. After all God doesn't have any police force. To such people in the Book of Sirach, the author warns: **“Say not: “I have sinned, yet what has befallen me?” for the Lord bides his time. Of forgiveness, be not overconfident, adding sin upon sin. Say not: “Great is his mercy; my many sins he will forgive. For mercy and anger alike are with him” (Sir 5:4-7)**. The only way that leads to salvation is **Jesus Christ and the undivided faith in him. To achieve eternal life there is only one simple condition Jesus poses before us; repent and believe in the gospel**. If we have the humility to accept our sins and confess them, he is ready to forgive us. In 1 John 1:9 we read, **“But if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness.”**