

Scripture Study

Second Sunday of Advent – Cycle A



Opening prayer

Isaiah 11:1-10

(Ps 72:1-2,7-8,12-13,17)

Romans 15:4-9

Matthew 3:1-12

Overview of the Gospel:

- This Sunday's gospel reading has the sudden appearance of John the Baptist preaching a message of repentance in the wilderness of Judea. Unlike the early chapters of Luke, this is the first time he is mentioned in Matthew's gospel.
- As he is baptizing the throngs that flock to hear him, John confronts the religious leaders who come to be baptized by him (verse 7). Recognizing their hypocrisy, he tells them their faith and deeds, like Abraham's, must match their words (verses 8-9).
- John's baptism was penitential, meaning that it was a ritual cleansing, an outward sign of interior preparation to meet the anticipated Messiah. This differs from Christian baptism, a sacrament that actually confers grace and cleanses from sin.
- John the Baptist has a twofold mission: to prepare the way for the Messiah, Jesus, and to testify to him when he comes. As we see in the very next verse following our reading (verse 13), Jesus is coming sooner than they think.

Questions:

- In the 1st Reading from the prophet Isaiah, who is he describing? In practical terms, how is the messianic kingdom described by Isaiah fulfilled, not only in the future, but here and now?
- In verses 8 and 9 of the 2nd Reading, St. Paul states that Jesus came in history for two reasons; what are they? How are those fulfilled in the 1st Reading? The 2nd Reading? How well are they being fulfilled in your life when others recognize you as a Catholic Christian?
- What was John the Baptist like? Why would anyone go out of their way to hear this radical preacher? Who did they think he was (2 Kings 1:8; John 1:19-23)?
- Assume that John the Baptist is speaking to you personally about repenting because "the kingdom of heaven is at hand." What is repentance? What repentance do you think God has in mind for you to do? What is the "kingdom of heaven?" How would you paraphrase John's message (verse 2) for people today?
- Assume further that John addressed you as one of the "brood of vipers." How might that figure apply to you? How would you respond to John's accusation?
- What does this passage say to you as followers of Christ? Are you "comfortable" with its challenges? Where does repentance still need to happen in your life?

Catechism of the Catholic Church: §§ 523-24, 717-20

Closing Prayer

Remember to read and meditate on the daily Mass readings found in the bulletin!

The Lord has brought condemnation—but against sin, not against man. —St. Augustine

"He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire"

Scripture: Matthew 3:1-12

Meditation: When the Lord Jesus comes "he baptizes with the Holy Spirit and with fire" (Matthew 3:11). Do you want to be on fire for God and for the return of the Lord Jesus when he comes in his glory? Fire in biblical times was associated with God and with his action in the world and in the lives of his people. God sometimes manifested his presence by use of fire, such as the burning bush which was not consumed when God spoke to Moses (Exodus 3:2). The image of fire was also used to symbolize God's glory (Ezekiel 1:4, 13), his protective presence (2 Kings 6:17), his holiness (Deuteronomy 4:24), righteous judgment (Zechariah 13:9), and his wrath against sin (Isaiah 66:15-16). It is also used of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 3:11 and Acts 2:3). God's fire both purifies and cleanses, and it inspires a reverent fear of God and of his word in us.

John the Baptist's life was fueled by one burning passion – to point others to Jesus Christ and to the coming of his kingdom. Who is John the Baptist and what is the significance of his message for our lives? Scripture tells us that John was *filled with the Holy Spirit even from his mother's womb* (Luke 1:15, 41) by Christ himself, whom Mary had just conceived by the Holy Spirit. When Mary visited her cousin Elizabeth John leapt in her womb as they were filled with the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:41). The fire of the Spirit dwelt in John and made him the forerunner of the coming Messiah. John was led by



the Spirit into the wilderness prior to his ministry where he was tested and grew in the word of God. John's clothing was reminiscent of the prophet Elijah (see Kings 1:8). John broke the prophetic silence of the previous centuries when he began to speak the word of God to the people of Israel. His message was similar to the message of the Old Testament prophets who chided the people of God for their unfaithfulness and who tried to awaken true repentance in them. Among a people unconcerned with the things of God, it was his work to awaken their interest, unsettle them from their complacency, and arouse in them enough good will to recognize and receive Christ when he came. Are you eager to hear God's word and to be changed by it through the power of the Holy Spirit?

John the Baptist was *more than a prophet* (Luke 7:26). John was the

voice of the Consoler who is coming (John 1:23; Isaiah 40:1-3). He completed the cycle of prophets begun by Elijah (Matthew 11:13-14). What the prophets had carefully searched for and angels longed to see, now came to completion as John made the way ready for the coming of the Messiah, God's Anointed Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. With John the Baptist, the Holy Spirit begins the restoration to the human race of the "divine likeness", prefiguring what would be achieved with and in the Lord Jesus. John's baptism was for repentance – turning away from sin and taking on a new way of life according to God's word. Our baptism in Jesus Christ by water and the Spirit results in a new birth and entry into God's kingdom as his beloved sons and daughters (John 3:5). Jesus is ready to give us the fire of his Spirit that we may radiate the joy and truth of the gospel to a world in desperate need of God's light and truth. His word has power to change and transform our lives that we may be lights pointing others to Christ. Like John the Baptist, we too are called to give testimony to the light and truth of Jesus Christ. Do you point others to Christ in the way you live, work, and speak?

"Lord, let your light burn brightly in my heart that I may know the joy and freedom of your kingdom. Fill me with your Holy Spirit and empower me to witness the truth of your gospel and to point others to Jesus Christ."

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