

Meditations: Sunday of the Second Week of Advent (Year B)

Some reflections that can assist our prayer in the second week of Advent. The topics are: God's mercy and patience; a call to conversion; rejecting sin.

12/10/2023

- God's mercy and patience
 - A call to conversion
 - Rejecting sin
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AS WE begin the second week of Advent, God once again comes out to meet us, inviting us to prepare for his Son's coming. He never tires of forgiving us, and the liturgical cycle helps us to remember his merciful love. In the first reading of today's Mass, the liturgy recalls the prophet Isaiah's call to conversion: *A voice cries: 'In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain'* (Is 40:3-4).

The Old Testament prophets, while exhorting the people to turn away from their sins, also announced that in the future, a new and eternal covenant would be established through one of David's descendants. The reading from Isaiah refers to a herald who will announce the Lord's coming: *Get you up to a high*

mountain, O Zion, herald of good tidings; lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good tidings, lift it up, fear not; say to the cities of Judah, 'Behold your God!' Behold, the Lord God comes with might (Is 40:9-10).

St. Mark begins his Gospel by quoting this invitation from the prophet, setting the stage for John the Baptist to be introduced. He is the figure announced by Isaiah, the one who will prepare the way for the Lord's definitive coming. The beginning of Jesus's public life is preceded by his cousin's prayer and penance. John preached the importance of *repentance for the forgiveness of sins* (Mk 1:4).

Advent is a good time to embrace this invitation to inner change. We can also thank God for showing us mercy by forgiving our sins so many times. "God presides over our prayer, and

you, my child, are speaking with him as one speaks with a brother, with a friend, with a father: full of confidence. Tell him: Lord, you are all Greatness, all Goodness, all Mercy. I know that You listen to me! That is why I am so in love with You, with all the coarseness of my manners, my poor hands soiled with the dust of the road.”^[1] —

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AFTER INTRODUCING John the Baptist, St. Mark briefly outlines his preaching, works, and the effects of his mission: *And they went out to him all the country of Judea, and all the people of Jerusalem [...]. Now John was clothed with camel's hair, and had a leather girdle round his waist, and ate locusts and wild honey (Mk 1:5-6).*

John's austere life draws people's attention. He preaches with deeds, a worthy representative of a priestly family, fully dedicated to the mission assigned to him by God. His attitude, lifestyle, and clothing indicate that he is the new Elijah, the one foreseen to precede the Anointed One of God. Moreover, he withdraws to the desert and lives a penitential existence that Jesus himself will later praise: *Why then did you go out? To see a man clothed in soft raiment? Behold, those who wear soft raiment are in kings' houses. Why then did you go out? To see a prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet (Mt 11:8-9).*

The Church invites us to meditate on John the Baptist's lifestyle and the way he prepared for Jesus's coming as we get ready to celebrate Christmas. "John's appeal therefore goes further and deeper than a lifestyle of moderation: it calls for

inner conversion, based on the individual's recognition and confession of his or her sin. While we are preparing for Christmas, it is important that we re-enter ourselves and make a sincere examination of our life.”^[2] —

We too are called to prepare inwardly for the birth of Christ with acts of conversion and penance. This is how St. Josemaría preached at the beginning of a liturgical year: “Jesus wants to see us dedicated, faithful, responsive. He wants us to love him. It is his desire that we be holy, very much his own. [...] You have been called to a life of faith, hope and charity. You cannot seek lesser goals, condemning yourself to a life of mediocre isolation. [...] Ask our Lady, along with me, to make it come true. Try to imagine how she spent these months, waiting for her Son to be born. And our Lady, Holy Mary, will make of you *alter Christus, ipse*

Christus: another Christ, Christ himself!”^[3]

JOHN THE Baptist's penitent figure prepared those who came to him: he invited everyone to desire and ask for the grace that the Messiah would bring. *After me comes he who is mightier than I, the thong of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit (Mk 1:7-8).* The baptismal rites St. John carried out were not yet the sacrament by which Jesus incorporates us into the mystery of his death and resurrection, but they expressed the humble desire for change, aversion to sin, and conversion to God.

In addition to preparing us for Christmas, Advent helps us consider

the judgment: the definitive coming of Jesus at the end of time. Seeing our lives in the light of that inevitable moment often helps us change our perspective on the events of our daily existence. It encourages us to make the most of the talents received, prompts us to use our time better, and gives more glory to God. Moreover, conversion includes sorrow for having offended God and the determination to reject sin as the only true evil: “I want, O Lord, to truly want, once and for all, to have an immeasurable abhorrence of anything that smacks of sin, even venial sin. I want a compunction like that of the people who have known how to please you best.”^[4] —

St. John the Baptist’s penitential practices were not limited to the baptismal rite. As a way of externally manifesting the inner change, pilgrims also *confessed their sins* (Mk 1:5). This confession was not yet the

sacrament of reconciliation, but it facilitated God's action in each soul and the beginning of a new life. After the coming of Jesus Christ, we can do more than externally confess our weaknesses, like those who spoke with John: we have God's forgiveness in the sacrament of mercy:

“Celebrating the Sacrament of Reconciliation means being enfolded in a warm embrace: it is the embrace of the Father's infinite mercy. [...] Each time we go to confession, God embraces us.”^[5]

Let us turn to the Virgin Mary, the model of preparation for the arrival of the Child Jesus. She will help us pray, with the collect prayer of today's Mass, to purify our dispositions in this Advent season: “Almighty and merciful God, may no earthly undertaking hinder those who set out in haste to meet your Son, but may our learning of

heavenly wisdom gain us admittance to his company.”[6]

[1] St. Josemaría, *In Dialogue with the Lord*, Scepter, 2018, pg. 35.

[2] Pope Benedict XVI, Angelus, 4-XII-2011.

[3] St. Josemaría, *Christ is Passing By*, no. 11.

[4] St. Josemaría, Intimate Notes, no. 23, 4-IV-1930.

[5] Pope Francis, Audience, 19-II-2014.

[6] Collect Prayer, Second Sunday of Advent.