

LECTIO DIVINA
SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT
CYCLE A

Bangalore (India), SR. DAISY ROSE PEENIKAPRAMBA, December 4, 2022. – The Proclamation of John the Baptist.

OPENING PRAYER

Almighty and merciful God, as we await with hope to welcome your beloved Son, let nothing worldly may become a stumbling block in our journey toward you. Open our hearts and minds to the wisdom of your Word Jesus Christ. We make this prayer through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

READING OF THE GOSPEL

Matthew 3:1-12

In those days John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness of Judea, proclaiming, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.” This is the one of whom the prophet Isaiah spoke when he said, “The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord; make his paths straight.’

Now John wore clothing of camel’s hair with a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. Then Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region around the Jordan were going out to him, and they were baptized by him in the River Jordan, confessing their sins.

But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for his baptism, he said to them, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Therefore, bear fruit worthy of repentance, and do not presume to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our ancestor,’ for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. Even now the axe is lying at the root of the trees; therefore every tree that does not bear good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire. “I baptize you with water for repentance, but the one who is coming after me is more powerful than I, and I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and will gather his wheat into the granary, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.”

MEDITATION

“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.” ‘Prepare the way of the Lord; make his paths straight.’

John the Baptist's life was fuelled by one burning passion - to point others to Jesus Christ and to the coming of his kingdom "A voice of one crying out in the desert, Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths. With Advent, we begin a new liturgical year, a new journey of faith that on the one hand commemorates the event of Jesus Christ and on the other opens us to the ultimate fulfilment.

Let us focus briefly on the personality of John the Baptist, the forerunner of Christ, a man with whom we meditate especially on the second Sunday of Advent. If Mary is the woman of Advent, John the Baptist is the man of Advent.

John wore clothing of camel's hair with a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey.

When we look at John, there is nothing attractive in him. He was not well-dressed or educated. We do not know of him having a house of his own. He lived in the wilderness. He never had grand meals, he ate locusts and honey. He seemed to have lived alone, yes, alone with his God. He had only one purpose, the purpose with which he has been sent; the forerunner of the Messiah. That was his only mission, nothing else mattered. So, he never bothered about living in a safe and comfortable house, nor about food, friends, or family. He had one vision and mission and lived it faithfully to the end. “Bear fruit worthy of repentance, and do not presume to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our ancestor,’ for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. Even now the axe is lying at the root of the trees; therefore, every tree that does not bear good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire”.

"God can raise up children to Abraham from these stones." These words of John the Baptist seem to spring from frustration rather than from anger. He is chiding these learned and observant men, the scribes and Pharisees, for their lack of comprehension. They are both the children and the leaders of Israel. Steeped in the law, these men know the prophecies and rely on the promises and hope for redemption. At this very moment, the promised redemption is about to dawn. Although they are face to face with it, they do not recognize the gift of God's visitation.

Advent is meant to be as John the Baptist. We let him remind us that we are people to whom God has given so many gifts. But do we find ourselves a bit complacent, relying on the fact that we are baptized, confirmed, married, consecrated, or anointed? Do we "presume that all is well because we are Christians? The Lord wants us to be fully alive, to practice a vibrant faith, and to keep our hearts pure.

The season of Advent invites us to examine our lives. It is to make ready our hearts for "the One who is coming," the One whom to listen to John's words and to act upon them, to bring a "baptism of the Holy Spirit and fire."

The Scripture often uses the image of stones which represent our vocation as parts of God's building. You are...built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the corner stone" (Eph 2:19-20; see also 1 Cor 3:10 ff.). Peter was called the rock upon which the Church would be built (cf. Mt 16:18), and we ourselves are the very stones. Abraham's faith remains firm in the edifice of Christ's holy People, the Church. It is for us to be firm and strong in our faith, to be stones that cry out in gratitude and praise (cf. Lk 19:40). "I baptize you with water for repentance, but the one who is coming after me is more powerful than I, and I am not worthy to carry his sandals".

What was John's greatness? His greatness was his humility and feeling of unworthiness: "I am not worthy to untie the sandals of the one who comes after me." What was his language? Language of challenge, confrontation, strong cry for repentance, and shunning evil. He lived a hard life, and his sayings were hard. He merited for his sayings: he was beheaded (Martyr for the mission). This was the cost of commitment.

"He will baptize you with] the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and will gather his wheat into the granary, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."

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 new birth and entry into God's kingdom as his beloved sons and daughters (John 3:5). The Lord Jesus comes to baptize each one of us in his Holy Spirit so that we may walk in his truth and holiness and radiate the joy of the Gospel to all we meet. God's word has the power to change and transform our lives so that we may be lights that point others to Jesus Christ. Like John the Baptist, we too are called to give testimony to the light and truth of Christ. Do we point others to Jesus Christ in the way we live, speak, and treat others? Let the Holy Spirit purify and transform our minds and heart.

PRAYER

Lord, you are my rock and my Redeemer. Teach me to rely on your strength in my weakness, in your firmness when I falter. Do not let me be complacent and inattentive. Rather, in this holy season when we celebrate your coming among us as man, let me be attentive and engaged, aware of your gifts, and intent on doing my best toward building up your kingdom. Lord, let your light burn brightly in my heart so 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. Amen.

CONTEMPLATION

Shall we learn from the depth of John the Baptist's commitment dropping all that hinders our closeness to the Lord, and experience His love, and proclamation of the kingdom?

Drop what you hold on and life will be meaningful... What shall I drop during this season of Advent as I wait eagerly for the coming of the Lord?

COMMITMENT

How did John the Baptist's words have so much of strength, authority, and influence? How can we make that strength and authority and influence our own?

Do I need a wilderness of silence to listen to the Word of God? How can I make a little space for God, silence within for God to speak to me?

What does it mean for me to "prepare the way of the Lord, make his path straight"? what are the mountains, hills and valleys, and crooked paths in my life? Who are the people who prepare the way of the Lord among us and in society?

CONCLUDING PRAYER

God Almighty, as we are nourished by your Word, give us the wisdom and grace to handle worldly matters with prudence and live a life worthy of heaven. We make this prayer through Christ our Lord, Amen.