

Year B—Advent, 2nd Sunday – 2014

- In our Gospel today from the beginning of Mark, the message of John the Baptist is: *Repentance!*...the same message Jesus and the apostles would also give.
- John's clothing made of camel's hair and the leather belt is to recall to Mark's reader the great prophet Elijah, who was clothed in the same way, and his food of locusts and wild honey marks John as living his whole life in simplicity and repentance... walking the walk that he himself was preaching.
- And then: "*...the inhabitants of Jerusalem were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the Jordan River as they acknowledged their sins.*" Most translations say "*as they confessed their sins.*"
- John's baptism was but an external symbol of interior conversion—the penitent's manifestation of the desire to win God's friendship.
- But then John says: "*One mightier than I is coming after me.*" I am unworthy to be His most menial servant and loosen his sandals. "*I have baptized you with water; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.*"
- The one who is coming could and would give that real friendship with God to all who will accept it.
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- Jesus says in the Gospels: "*Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has risen no one greater than John the Baptist...*" (Mat 11:11 RSV)...a recommendation for emulation if ever there was one.
- So what characterized John for such praise from God Himself? He lived simply...humbly...trusted in God's providence, and sought to please God in everything that he did...recognizing his utter dependence on God.
- And regardless of difficulty and challenge and even imprisonment, he was always faithful in his life and preaching.
- The repentance of which John speaks is simply the turning from the things that are wrong, and seeking the things that are good and

Year B—Advent, 2nd Sunday – 2014

right...the fidelity to God in all things, and for us in our day, fidelity to the teaching of God's Church.

- The greatest vehicle of repentance is, of course, the sacrament of Confession...so underutilized, and yet such a fountain of God's grace and mercy...which so many pass by.
- Just a few minutes of sincere confession and the absolution of a priest, and you may very well go from being in mortal danger of eternal damnation to a state of grace and the assurance of eternal life...simply by this tiny act of humility.
- But, of course, many say: *"I don't have to confess my sins to a man. I can confess directly to God!"* Many of our young people especially are challenged about this by their non-Catholic friends.
- So...young people: listen up!
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- But this so-called "confessing directly to God"...is that what God wants? Or are simply saying to Him: *"This is what you're going to get! I have decided that THIS is the way you will forgive sins."*
- Others may say: "I'm not going to that priest; he's just a man, and as sinful as I am!"
- Well...maybe so. But it's not the broom but rather the action of the sweeper which cleans the floor. The broom—like the priest—is simply an instrument.
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- So...is confession just an unnecessary novelty made up by the Catholic Church? Well...let's look at history and scripture.
- Even in the time of Moses, the Israelites confessed their sins when they presented a sin offering to God:
- Leviticus 5: *"When a man is guilty...he shall confess the sin he has committed, and he shall bring his guilt offering to the LORD for the sin which he has committed..."* (Leviticus 5:5-6)
- And the penitent made that guilt offering via the priest...and scriptures emphasize over and over: *"...the priest shall make*

Year B—Advent, 2nd Sunday – 2014

atonement for [the penitent], and he shall be forgiven.” (Lev 4:20)

- Likewise in confession, through the priest rises up the penitent’s guilt offering of prayer and repentance to God...and through the priest comes the grace of forgiveness. This is not through the merit of the priest, but rather he is simply God’s instrument.
- That’s why the grace of the confession does not depend upon the personal holiness of the priest; it is GOD who gives the grace.
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- What other ancient evidence of confession? Numbers 5: “*When a man or woman commits any of the sins that men commit by breaking faith with the LORD...he shall confess his sin which he has committed; and he shall make full restitution for his wrong...*” (Numbers 5:6-7)
- Fast forward to Psalm 32...500 years after Moses: “*I acknowledged my sin to thee, and I did not hide my iniquity; I said, “I will confess my transgressions to the LORD”; **then** thou didst forgive [my] guilt...*” (Psalms 32:5)
- Proverbs 28: “*He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy.*” (Proverbs 28:13)
- The book of Nehemiah: “*...the people of Israel were assembled with fasting and in sackcloth, ... and stood and confessed their sins...*” (Nehemiah 9:1-2)
- The book of Sirach...only a hundred years or so before Jesus: “*Do not be ashamed to confess your sins...*” (Sirach 4:26).
- Forward again to today’s Gospel and John the Baptist: “*...they were baptized ...confessing their sins.*” (Matthew 3:5-6)
- In the Acts of the Apostles: “*Many...of those who were now believers came, confessing and divulging their practices.*” (Acts 19:18)

Year B—Advent, 2nd Sunday – 2014

- And, most of all, the words of the Risen Christ to His Apostles: *“Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained.”*
- So, to say that confession is unbiblical or that the Church just “made it up” is ridiculous; it has been part of the worship of God—and of repentance—since the time of Moses.
- So, kids...when your non-Catholic friends challenge you: “Where is confession of sins in the Bible?!”...you can answer: “Well, other than the books of Leviticus, Numbers, Psalms, Proverbs, Ezekiel, Nehemiah, Sirach, Acts of the Apostles, the letters of James and John and the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and John...I just can’t think of one!”
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- So during this Advent season, make straight the way of the Lord to your heart by repentance and good confession.
- By the way...the Church teaches that confession is the ONLY regular way that mortal sins may be forgiven, and while venial sins do not have to be confessed to be forgiven, it’s still a good idea and a source of God’s grace.
- God’s mercy and grace are prevented from reaching us only by our own stubbornness.
- And in this Advent, let us—like John the Baptist—plant seeds within ourselves through prayer, the Word of God and the sacraments...and plant seeds in others through our words and good works.
- Perhaps that word, that kind gesture, may grow into the tree of faith within them. The seed never planted never sprouts.
- As St. Paul tells us, we may plant and water, but it is God who, through His grace, gives the growth.
- As one of my favorite poems goes:

In [my] youth, because I could not be a singer,
I did not even try to write a song;
I set not little trees along the roadside,

Year B—Advent, 2nd Sunday – 2014

Because I knew their growth would take so long.

But now from wisdom that the years have brought me,
I know that it may be a blessed thing
To plant a tree for someone else to water,
Or [write] a song for someone else to sing.”

Year B—Advent, 2nd Sunday – 2014

Reading 1

[Is 40:1-5, 9-11](#)

Comfort, give comfort to my people,
says your God.
Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her
that her service is at an end,
her guilt is expiated;
indeed, she has received from the hand of the LORD
double for all her sins.

A voice cries out:

In the desert prepare the way of the LORD!
Make straight in the wasteland a highway for our God!
Every valley shall be filled in,
every mountain and hill shall be made low;
the rugged land shall be made a plain,
the rough country, a broad valley.
Then the glory of the LORD shall be revealed,
and all people shall see it together;
for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.

Go up on to a high mountain,
Zion, herald of glad tidings;
cry out at the top of your voice,
Jerusalem, herald of good news!
Fear not to cry out
and say to the cities of Judah:
Here is your God!
Here comes with power
the Lord GOD,
who rules by his strong arm;
here is his reward with him,
his recompense before him.
Like a shepherd he feeds his flock;
in his arms he gathers the lambs,
carrying them in his bosom,
and leading the ewes with care.

Year B—Advent, 2nd Sunday – 2014

Responsorial Psalm

[Ps 85:9-10-11-12, 13-14](#)

R. (8) Lord, let us see your kindness, and grant us your salvation.

I will hear what God proclaims;

the LORD—for he proclaims peace to his people.

Near indeed is his salvation to those who fear him,

glory dwelling in our land.

R. Lord, let us see your kindness, and grant us your salvation.

Kindness and truth shall meet;

justice and peace shall kiss.

Truth shall spring out of the earth,

and justice shall look down from heaven.

R. Lord, let us see your kindness, and grant us your salvation.

The LORD himself will give his benefits;

our land shall yield its increase.

Justice shall walk before him,

and prepare the way of his steps.

R. Lord, let us see your kindness, and grant us your salvation.

Reading II

[2 Pt 3:8-14](#)

Do not ignore this one fact, beloved,
that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years
and a thousand years like one day.

The Lord does not delay his promise, as some regard “delay,”

but he is patient with you,

not wishing that any should perish

but that all should come to repentance.

But the day of the Lord will come like a thief,

and then the heavens will pass away with a mighty roar

and the elements will be dissolved by fire,

and the earth and everything done on it will be found out.

Since everything is to be dissolved in this way,

what sort of persons ought you to be,

conducting yourselves in holiness and devotion,

waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God,

because of which the heavens will be dissolved in flames

and the elements melted by fire.

But according to his promise

we await new heavens and a new earth

in which righteousness dwells.

Therefore, beloved, since you await these things,

be eager to be found without spot or blemish before him, at peace.

Year B—Advent, 2nd Sunday – 2014

Gospel

[Mk 1:1-8](#)

The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ the Son of God.

As it is written in Isaiah the prophet:

*Behold, I am sending my messenger ahead of you;
he will prepare your way.*

A voice of one crying out in the desert:

*“Prepare the way of the Lord,
make straight his paths.”*

John the Baptist appeared in the desert
proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

People of the whole Judean countryside

and **all** the inhabitants of Jerusalem

were going out to him

and were being baptized by him in the Jordan River

as they acknowledged their sins.

John was clothed in camel’s hair,

with a leather belt around his waist.

He fed on locusts and wild honey.

And this is what he proclaimed:

“One mightier than I is coming after me.

I am not worthy to stoop and loosen the thongs of his sandals.

I have baptized you with water;

he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”