

- So John the Baptist preached along two themes: repentance from sin, and producing the good fruits of a good life...the accomplishing of good works of charity...emphasized time and again throughout the Old and New Testaments.
- First, of course, is repentance...without which our good works have little effect...for in sin, which is acting against the Good, --the will of God—we separate ourselves from God—from Christ—who teaches us: *“I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. If a man does not abide in me, he is cast forth as a branch and withers....”* (John 15:5-6 RSV)
- Jesus Himself emphasizes repentance repeatedly throughout His own mission...urging us to seek to be perfect as Our Heavenly Father is perfect. (cf. Mt 5:48)
-
- Repentance and producing good fruits of charity are really two sides of the same coin when we think about it...for the law of God is based entirely on love.
- When we think “repentance”, we think “Commandments”...and hearken back to the two great commandments, which sum up all law and prophets: Love the Lord your God with your whole heart, mind, soul and strength...and your neighbor as yourself.
- The Ten Commandments are written by God on two tablets of stone to indicate that they are simply an amplification of those two great commandments of charity.
- The first three commandments comprise our duty to God as our Creator and Father...giving God His due, so to speak, of worship, fidelity, reverence and service.
- The fourth commandment (honor thy father and mother) is a bridge of sorts...emphasizing our duty towards those who are God’s representatives on earth, and who are, of all men and women, our greatest benefactors.

- And the following six commandments contain our duties to ourselves and to our fellow man—5: protection of life; 6: protection of purity; 7: of property; 8: of honor; 9 & 10: of domestic life.
 - These are the things that give peace, both external and internal. As the psalm says: *“Great peace have those who love thy law; nothing can make them stumble...by thy commandments I have had understanding.”* (Psalm 119:165, 104)
 - And, of course, when the young man asks Jesus: *“What must I do to attain eternal life?”* ...Jesus tells Him first and foremost to keep the Commandments...without which there is no salvation.
 - And not just some of them...the ones we find easiest...but all...for as St. James tell us: *“...whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it.”* (James 2:10 RSV)
 - Why is that? Because the commandments form a whole....so closely bound up with one another that one cannot be maintained without the others. Violation of one transgresses that underlying foundation of charity, upon which all the commandments depend (St. Augustine).
 - Like a stringed instrument, one broken string ruins the entire melody...or, like an army, one careless soldier can lead to the ruin of all.
 -
 - And keeping the commandments, as St. John says, is not burdensome; As Jesus tells us: *“Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble of heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”* (Matthew 11:29-30 RSV)
 - It is refraining from evil, which keeps our conscience at peace and our soul at rest.
-
- And so...how to bear good fruit? Through works of mercy.

- The bodily (corporal) wants of our neighbor are food, drink, clothing, shelter, liberty, health and life...and thus the seven corporal works of mercy are to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, give drink to the thirsty, shelter the homeless, visit the sick and those in prison, and to bury the dead. Older variations on these include to harbor the stranger, and to ransom the captive.
- Our Lord tells us unequivocally that it is not the possession, but rather the good use, of earthly goods which make us truly rich... and it is in his moral qualities—virtue, and not wealth—that man’s real dignity and greatness consist.
- “...*whoever would be great among you must be your servant... even as the Son of man came not to be served but to serve...*” (Matthew 20:26-28 RSV)
- What better life is there than to emulate Our Lord in this? The grave teaches us of the worthlessness of earth’s wealth...for we take nothing with us at death except the record of what we have done in life—both the good and the bad—and no one can be called happy until the outcome of his judgment before God. “*Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*” (Matthew 6:21)

-
- Now the seven spiritual—and thus even greater—works of mercy are counseling the doubtful, instructing the ignorant (the untaught), admonishing the sinner, comforting the sorrowful and afflicted, forgiving injury, bearing wrongs patiently, and praying for the living and the dead...and, of course, facilitating the same with material resources.
 - In these we cooperate with God for the salvation of souls—and so they are the highest and most merciful of all works done for our neighbor.
 - This is something catechists ought remember; in teaching the young or those who do not yet know, you walk hand-in-hand with Our Lord leading others to their salvation.

- If people realized the great reward awaiting catechists for instructing the young in virtue and godliness, we'd have a line of volunteers all the way to Pojoaque.

-
- And so...following the commandments of charity—both in obedience to God's moral law and in active giving of self to others—is the repentance and good fruit of which the Baptist speaks in our Gospel today...a wonderful opportunity of which we have today in our Christian Concern Committee collection.
 - As we continue our Advent season, let the realization of these truths take root deeply and act with no delay, for as Paul writes: *"Behold, now is the acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation."* (2Cor 6:2 RSV)
 - And this Advent season then becomes even more joyful...more hope-filled...knowing that, as we watch for Our Savior and Lord, we can greet Him with clean heart...clean conscience...bearing with us fruits of charity and obedience...being a beloved child of the Father...and a useful servant of God.

Reading 1

[Is 11:1-10](#)

On that day, a shoot shall sprout from the stump of Jesse,
and from his roots a bud shall blossom.

The spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him:
a spirit of wisdom and of understanding,
a spirit of counsel and of strength,
a spirit of knowledge and of fear of the LORD,
and his delight shall be the fear of the LORD.

Not by appearance shall he judge,
nor by hearsay shall he decide,

but he shall judge the poor with justice,
and decide aright for the land's afflicted.

He shall strike the ruthless with the rod of his mouth,
and with the breath of his lips he shall slay the wicked.

Justice shall be the band around his waist,
and faithfulness a belt upon his hips.

Then the wolf shall be a guest of the lamb,
and the leopard shall lie down with the kid;
the calf and the young lion shall browse together,
with a little child to guide them.

The cow and the bear shall be neighbors,
together their young shall rest;
the lion shall eat hay like the ox.

The baby shall play by the cobra's den,
and the child lay his hand on the adder's lair.

There shall be no harm or ruin on all my holy mountain;
for the earth shall be filled with knowledge of the LORD,
as water covers the sea.

On that day, the root of Jesse,
set up as a signal for the nations,
the Gentiles shall seek out,
for his dwelling shall be glorious.

[Ps 72:1-2, 7-8, 12-13, 17.](#)

Responsorial Psalm

R. (cf. 7) **Justice shall flourish in his time, and fullness of peace for ever.**

O God, with your judgment endow the king,
and with your justice, the king's son;
he shall govern your people with justice
and your afflicted ones with judgment.

R. **Justice shall flourish in his time, and fullness of peace for ever.**

Justice shall flower in his days,
and profound peace, till the moon be no more.

May he rule from sea to sea,
and from the River to the ends of the earth.

R. **Justice shall flourish in his time, and fullness of peace for ever.**

For he shall rescue the poor when he cries out,
and the afflicted when he has no one to help him.

He shall have pity for the lowly and the poor;
the lives of the poor he shall save.

R. **Justice shall flourish in his time, and fullness of peace for ever.**

May his name be blessed forever;
as long as the sun his name shall remain.

In him shall all the tribes of the earth be blessed;
all the nations shall proclaim his happiness.

R. **Justice shall flourish in his time, and fullness of peace for ever.**

[Rom 15:4-9](#)

Reading 2

Brothers and sisters:

Whatever was written previously was written for our instruction,
that by endurance and by the encouragement of the Scriptures
we might have hope.

May the God of endurance and encouragement
grant you to think in harmony with one another,
in keeping with Christ Jesus,
that with one accord you may with one voice
glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Welcome one another, then, as Christ welcomed you,
for the glory of God.

For I say that Christ became a minister of the circumcised
to show God's truthfulness,
to confirm the promises to the patriarchs,
but so that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy.

As it is written:

*Therefore, I will praise you among the Gentiles
and sing praises to your name.*

[Mt 3:1-12](#)

Gospel

John the Baptist appeared, preaching in the desert of Judea and saying, “**Repent**, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!” It was of him that the prophet Isaiah had spoken when he said:
*A voice of one crying out in the desert,
Prepare the way of the Lord,
make straight his paths.*

**John wore clothing made of camel’s hair
and had a leather belt around his waist.
His food was locusts and wild honey.**

At that time Jerusalem, all Judea,
and the whole region around the Jordan
were going out to him
and were being baptized by him in the Jordan River
as they acknowledged their sins.

When he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from **the coming wrath**? Produce good fruit as evidence of your repentance. And do not presume to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’

For I tell you,
God can raise up children to Abraham from these stones.
Even now the ax lies 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 am baptizing you with water, for repentance,
but the one who is coming after me is mightier than I.

I am not worthy to carry his sandals.
He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.
His winnowing fan is in his hand.

**He will clear his threshing floor
and gather his wheat into his barn,
but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.”**