

Rev. Derek Fairman

2nd Sunday of Advent B

The Advent season is about preparation. We remember the way that the people of Israel were prepared for the coming of the Messiah. In the Gospel we hear about the ways that St. John the Baptist prepared the people of Israel for the Public Ministry of the Lord Jesus. We remember what God has done, but also what He will do. We prepare our hearts for the coming of the Lord Jesus at the end of time. We prepare our hearts to meet Him in death. We open our hearts for His coming into our lives this Christmas.

We know that at the end of time will come the Last Judgment. What can we do about the end of time? Nothing. There is nothing that we can do to prevent the Last Judgment from happening. The Lord Jesus will return, whether anyone wants Him to return or not. There is also nothing that we can do to prevent our own judgment at the moment of death. We cannot avoid that anymore than we can avoid death itself.

Even though few may look forward to these events, we cannot do anything about them coming. However, although we can do nothing to prevent them, that does not mean that we cannot prepare for their coming. How do we prepare? Of course, the best and easiest and most direct way of avoiding judgment for our sins is to not commit sins. But we also prepare through the Sacrament of Confession.

In the Gospel reading, we hear about John the Baptist and what he was doing in the desert by the Jordan river. What was it about him that drew people? He was proclaiming a baptism of forgiveness. He was baptizing them as they acknowledged their sins. There is something more going on though. On his own, he could be ignored. He could be called insane. He was wearing camel hair and eating wild locusts and honey. People did not come to him just because it was him. People recognized in his call to repentance a voice deep within themselves.

This is similar to the prophet Jonah. When he preached the destruction of the city to the people of Nineveh, they repented. Jonah himself was not a threat; one man walking around a city would not be. However, Jonah's message was a message that they had heard before, within their own hearts. He threatened the city with destruction, and the people listened because they feared this would happen. Jonah was a physical reminder of the wrongs that the people of Nineveh had committed, that these wrongs would catch up to them. He himself was a warning to the people; his footsteps were the footsteps of doom to the people of Nineveh. That is why they listened.

When John the Baptist appeared in the desert, the people could have just ignored him. They did not have to go out into the desert, but they did go out. His voice, that voice crying out in the desert foretold by Isaiah, was a voice in perfect tune with what their own consciences were telling them. Their own consciences were speaking to them, and John the Baptist's voice told them to repent, and they did. That voice crying out in the desert echoed in their own hearts.

What about our repentance? Sometimes we hesitate to repent. We can hesitate to receive the Sacrament of Confession. When we receive the Sacrament of Confession, the voice that we hear in Confession is not just someone else's voice. It is not simply a human voice, or else we could just ignore it. Rather, in Confession we hear the Lord's voice, a voice that we hear echoing within us and that we recognize deep within ourselves.

This voice calls us to be truly ourselves, the person God intended us to be. This voice calls us to be a better version of ourselves. This voice helps us to see ourselves as God does. This voice is the voice of our own conscience. It is this voice that is deep within us. We might be afraid of this voice, or we might not want to listen to this voice. However, we cannot run away from that voice. What we can do and what we need to do is listen to this voice.

If we don't really pay much attention to this voice, we will think that this voice is the voice of a stranger when we do hear it. Yet if we pay attention to that voice and we listen, we can recognize not the voice of a stranger but the voice of a friend. We find in the Lord not just judgment but mercy. We find in the Lord someone who is only interested in our welfare. We find in the Lord someone who tells us the truth to help us grow, not to crush our spirits. We find a voice of comfort and tenderness, as we heard in the reading from the Book of the prophet Isaiah.

As we approach the altar, we ask the Lord that we may know that voice within our hearts, and listen to the voice that is within us. We cannot simply run away from that voice. Whether now or in the future, we will have to accept responsibility. If we ignore that voice, it doesn't mean that we will not have to face responsibility. Yet the Lord has better plans for us. He wants us to find comfort, not pain. We will find comfort after we have received forgiveness from Him.