

The Second Sunday of Advent December 6, 2020

Sister Bethany was speaking to a class of kindergarten students. She asked them questions about their faith like “Who is Jesus?”, “Who is Mary?”, and “What happened on Christmas day?” They all raised their hands up whenever Sister Bethany would ask them a question and they were all eager to show her how much they knew.

Then, Sister Bethany started to talk to them about how much Jesus loves them. Sitting quietly, they listened to her every word. She then encouraged them to take time every day to ask God what He wanted from them. She told them that it wasn’t always easy to know what God wants, that sometimes it takes time to figure it out, but that if we pray God will show us the way to go.

One of the children, Simon, shot his hand up and said, “Sister! Sister! I know what God wants!” Amused by his exuberance, Sister replied. “Do you, Simon? What does God want?” He said, “God wants to put His love into our hearts so that we can give it to others!”

Simon’s answer reminded Sister Bethany that, sometimes we adults make things more complicated than they need to be. Ultimately, God’s plan for us is simple - that we recognize how much He loves us and that we treat others with the same love God has shown us.

Today’s gospel reading presents us with the figure of Saint John the Baptist. Every Advent, the Church has us reflect on this great prophet as we prepare to celebrate the birth of Jesus. He was the one sent by God to prepare Israel for the coming of the Messiah. His voice continues to resound two thousand years later calling us to repent of our sins not only to prepare ourselves for Christmas but for the second coming of Jesus in glory at the end of the world.

When we see the figure of John the Baptist living in the desert, eating grasshoppers, and wearing camel hair, we might not think of him as a childlike person. But he is. He lived a very simple and humble life, not surrounding himself with luxury or even with what we might consider the bare necessities of life like a home or regular meals. Despite his fame and influence, he did not seek riches or power for himself. In fact, he was not concerned with himself at all. Rather, he kept reminding the people that they should be keeping an eye out for the “one who is greater than I”. And, his message was simple - repent of your sins and be baptized.

We adults can certainly make things complicated. But, during this Advent Season, the Church is reminding us to keep things simple.

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These weeks leading up to Christmas can be very hectic. We want everything to be perfect, we want to meet everyone's expectations, and we want to make it a special day for our families. Every year we need to be reminded that, in the flurry of activity, we may be missing the point. It is simply that God loves us and that He wants us to share that love with others. Maybe showing love means giving someone a present. Maybe it means spending time with them. Maybe it means listening to them, comforting them when they are hurting, or supporting them when they are down. Maybe it means cooking them a meal. Maybe it means praying for them. But the point of it all is that we share love. When we keep things simple like that, then we are less likely to get overwhelmed and more likely to recognize God at work in our lives.

The simple truth is that, if we are to share God's love with others, we have to be willing to receive it into our hearts. John the Baptist calls us to repent of our sins this Advent Season. What is sin? It is simply our rejection of God's love. It is simply choosing to serve something other than God. When I choose to sin, I push God's love aside and refuse to love my neighbor.

Perhaps, the best preparation for Christmas, then, is a simple examination of conscience. When have I failed to love as I should? When have I taken when I should have given? When have I talked when I should have listened? When did I look for comfort in something other than God? How have I hurt others? What do I need to give up so that I can give more of my heart to God and to His people?

It is not easy to go into the dark places of our hearts and take a hard look at ourselves as we really are. But it is precisely in those dark places that Jesus wants to bring us His light. It is precisely in those places where our heart is cold that He wants to bring His warmth. If we keep hiding those areas from ourselves and from God, then His love cannot find a home in us.

Once we have made a good examination of conscience, the next step is to bring all that to God through the Sacrament of Mercy - by confessing our sins. In this sacrament, we meet Jesus the Healer, who can relieve us of our guilt and strengthen us to overcome our weakness. Imagine what this Christmas would be like if we were to know in our hearts that we are right with God and able to open our souls to the Christ child born for us!

On Christmas Day, we will celebrate the love of God made manifest in Jesus. God wants each of us to welcome that love into our hearts and share it with others. That love is also made manifest to us today in a simple yet profound way - in the Bread of Life, the Body and Blood of Jesus given to us today. Let us keep our hearts pure and

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childlike then, so that we can receive the Eucharist and share the sacrificial love of God with others.

Let us be like Simon and like Saint John the Baptist and keep things simple during these hectic times. Let us welcome God's love into our hearts and share it with others.