

**Advent II, December 9, 2018, 9 AM Mass, Fr. Abraham**

**As we move into the second week of Advent, the words of St. Paul reminds us “to be pure of heart and come blameless filled with the fruit of holiness through Christ Jesus for the glory and praise of God.” In the first reading from Baruch we are summoned to rejoice and dress in the splendor of God’s glory, wrapping ourselves in the cloak of justice and bearing the miter of God’s eternal name for our God leads us home.**

**Advent is a time of eager waiting. We wait for Christ and to get back to our home. Waiting is one of the hardest things for us nowadays. There is so much urgency about even the smallest things in our modern world, and this, of course, is greatly aggravated by commercial advertising. M. Scott Peck in his famous book, “The Road Less Travelled”, says that delaying gratification is one of the effective tools to discipline ourselves. It is to accomplish the difficult part of a task first before going for the easy portion of the same. This is a tool with which pain is confronted rather than avoided. Therefore we have to meet John the Baptist before we can meet Christ. We have to begin with John, “a voice crying in the wilderness” demanding tough decisions. So let us enter the wilderness of our world and our own being .... And wait there for developments undergoing a total transformation.**

**John the Baptist challenged the people to go down to the river Jordan and to receive baptism allowing them immersed in the water. The word ‘baptism’ literally means being overwhelmed by or immersed in water. It is used in the case of Naaman in 2Kings 5:14 who was cured of leprosy by being immersed seven times in the waters of Jordan. Judith immersed herself in purifying waters in preparation for the mission God had for her (Judith 12:7). It**

was from the chaos of the swirling waters that God brought forth creation. It was through the waters of the Red Sea that the people had to pass to find freedom (Ex. 14:21-31).

It was customary to baptize Gentiles who converted to Judaism. John, however, is baptizing Jews, asserting thereby that being a Jew is not enough. A complete purification is needed by all if they are to enjoy the new creation and the new redemption promised by God. Today we reminded that by being just a Christian is not enough, but we are asked to have a complete purification to welcome worthily Jesus into our lives.

John's baptism is described as a 'baptism of repentance'. Repentance involves the change of mind and heart, and turning to God. In those days, the people were guided in many directions by the religious leaders with the promise of salvation. The Sadducees were calling them in fidelity to the cult and to tradition. The Pharisees saw salvation as coming from fidelity to God's will as expressed in meticulous observance of the Law. Another group, Essenes, called for a withdrawal from the darkness of the world, in preparation for the coming the Messiah.

The Baptist, however, stood out against all these groups and called for a new way of looking at life, a change of heart and mind, a new vision as expressed by prophet Ezekiel (36:25-26): "I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleanness, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. A new heart I will give you and a new spirit I will put within you, and I will remove from your body the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.

**With the coming of the Lord we are assured of salvation by the forgiveness of their sins. The Greek word for 'sin' is hamartia, which literally means 'missing the mark'. One thinks of an arrow veering away from the desired direction, or a person lost in a forest, having missed the marked way. Again the Greek word for 'forgiveness' is aphasis, which means 'casting away.'**

**In brief, the preparation of Christmas involves in casting away of all that would distract us from reaching our goal and to receive the good news that God loves us and all are God's beloved sons and daughters and we have to love them. But remember what blessed Mother Theresa said: 'The fruit of faith is love and fruit of love is service.'**

**Therefore much has to be done to 'prepare the way of the Lord' through the good news preached through our lives. Just like John the Baptist, the disciples of Jesus has the same universal mission of preparing the Lord's way where 'all flesh shall see the salvation of the God'.**

**William Bausch offers some suggestions as to how we might accommodate the Baptizer. "Make friends with someone you're at odds with. Pick up the phone and talk to somebody you haven't talked to in months or years. Be the first to hold out the hand of reconciliation even though it gets slapped or rejected. Don't turn your head at shady dealings. Be willing to put some of your possessions on the line. Tithe, not out of your excess, but out of your substance. Add up the amounts you have set aside for your Christmas spending, and then slice off 10 percent and give it to the poor. Give evidence that you mean to repent."**