

Sunday, December 10, 2017

Second Sunday of Advent

Meditation and Questions for Reflection or Group Discussion

Mass Readings:

1st Reading: Isaiah 40:1-5, 9-11

2nd Reading: 2 Peter 3:8-14

Responsorial: Psalm 85:9-14

Gospel: Mark 1:1-8

Advent, A Time to Open Ourselves to a Deeper Infilling of the Holy Spirit

He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit. (Mark 1:8)

The Holy Spirit—he makes all the difference. John had preached a baptism of repentance for sins, but he promised that someone “mightier” was coming—someone who would fill us with the Holy Spirit (Mark 1:7). So what is that difference?

John’s baptism focused on the past, on forgiveness for sins already committed. He wanted people to put the past behind them. The Holy Spirit, however, focuses on the future. He comes to mold us and shape us, to lead us into the kingdom of heaven.

John’s baptism was for one purpose: for our pardon. But the Holy Spirit has many purposes. He reveals God’s love to us. He helps us understand Scripture. He teaches us how to live as brothers and sisters. He holds the Church together and moves us to work for the kingdom of God. And so much more.

When we are baptized into Christ, we get both blessings. Our sins are washed away, and we receive the Holy Spirit. Jesus doesn’t want us to miss out on anything! It’s all wrapped up in one gift, which we call the “seed of faith.” If we want to see these blessings unfold in our lives, we need to tend to and nurture this seed.

A simple analogy might help. The main reason most of us go on a healthy diet is to lose weight, but so much more happens when we change our eating habits. Yes, the weight drops. But our cholesterol levels also improve. Our immune system is strengthened. We feel more energetic, and we sleep better. We just wanted to lose weight, but our whole lives have been changed.

This is what happens when we care for our seed of faith. Not only do we experience God’s forgiveness, but we invite the Holy Spirit to work in every other area of our lives. We feel God’s love. We become more loving. We want to reach out to those who are hurting. We find the strength to say no to temptation. In short, we become a new creation.

“Thank you, Jesus, for the gift of the Holy Spirit! Lord, help me grow my faith.”

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Questions for Reflection or Discussion:

1. The first reading begins with these words, “Comfort. Comfort my people, says your God.” It ends with these words: “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.”
 - How would you describe the “comfort” that God is offering his people in this reading? In what ways do these words reflect the Lord’s great love and mercy toward his suffering people, Israel?
 - How would you describe the “comfort” and “care” you have received from the Lord your shepherd?
2. The responsorial psalm opens with these words: “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.”
 - How would you describe the “peace” that God proclaims to his people?
 - What do you think the psalmist meant by these words: “Near indeed is his salvation to those who fear him”?
3. The responsorial psalm speaks also of the close relationship between kindness and truth and between justice and peace saying that “Kindness and truth shall meet” and “justice and peace shall kiss.”
 - As you reflect on the coming of Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace, during this Advent Season, what specifically can you do to help restore justice and peace within your family, or among family members?
 - What can you do to help restore justice and peace within your community through acts of kindness and truth?
4. The second reading begins with these challenging words: “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.”
 - In what ways are these words not only challenging, but also encouraging?
 - In what ways do they apply to you?
5. The second reading exhorts us also to live holy lives with these words: “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.”
 - Why do you think “conducting yourselves in holiness and devotion” can result in “hastening the coming of the day of God”? In what areas of your life are these words a challenge for you?
6. The Gospel reading repeats the prophetic words of the first reading, “A voice of one crying out in the desert: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths.’”
 - What are some steps you can take to “Prepare the way of the Lord” by receiving Jesus more deeply into your heart during this Advent and Christmas season?
 - What can you do to help your family, your friends and neighbors, or your co-workers prepare to receive Christ in a deeper way as well during this grace-filled season?
7. The Gospel reading goes on to describe how “John the Baptist appeared in the desert proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.”
 - In response to this message of “repentance for the forgiveness of sins,” are you willing to make a commitment to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation during this Advent and Christmas season? Why or why not?
 - If so, what are some ways that you and your family can prepare for this Sacrament?
8. The meditation is a reflection on this verse in the Gospel reading: “He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.” It begins with these words: “The Holy Spirit—he makes all the difference. John had preached a baptism of repentance for sins, but he promised that someone ‘mightier’ was coming—someone who would fill us with the Holy Spirit. So what is that difference?”
 - How would you describe the difference between John’s baptism and the Sacrament of Baptism?
 - What do you think is meant by these words from the meditation? “John’s baptism focused on the past, on forgiveness for sins already committed. He wanted people to put the past behind them. The Holy Spirit, however, focuses on the future. He comes to mold us and shape us, to lead us into the kingdom of heaven.”
9. Take some time now to pray and thank the Lord for the great gift of the Holy Spirit you received at your Baptism, and to ask for the grace to use this gift to grow deeper in your faith in Jesus. Use the prayer at the end of the meditation as the starting point.

Thank you, Jesus, for the gift of the Holy Spirit! Lord, help me grow my faith.

[The discussion questions were created by Maurice Blumberg, who is currently a member of the board of directors of the **Christlife Catholic Ministry for Evangelization** (www.christlife.org/) and a member of the **National Service Committee Council of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal** (www.nsc-chariscenter.org). Maurice was also the founding

As posted on the Catholic Charismatic Renewal National Service Committee’s website: www.nsc-chariscenter.org

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