

Sunday, December 4, 2016

Second Sunday of Advent

Meditation and Questions for Reflection or Group Discussion

Mass Readings:

1st Reading: Isaiah 11:1-10

Responsorial: Psalm 72:1-2, 7-8, 12-13, 17

2nd Reading: Romans 15:4-9

Gospel: Matthew 3:1-12

Being Baptized with the Holy Spirit and Fire

He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. (Matthew 3:11)

In his Letter to the Romans, St. Paul writes, “We were indeed buried with him through baptism into death so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might live in newness of life” (Romans 6:4).

In this verse, Paul is saying that at our baptism, we are “buried” with Jesus and then “raised” to a new life with him. He tells us that the outward signs of baptism—water, oil, light, a white robe—are intricately tied to the inward work of regeneration that God does in everyone at their baptism. Each of us becomes “dead to sin and living for God” (Romans 6:11).

In today’s Gospel passage, John the Baptist talks about baptism as well. Only here he is saying that Jesus has come to baptize us not with water, but “with the Holy Spirit and fire” (Matthew 3:11). So what’s the difference?

Water baptism washes us from original sin and brings us into a new relationship with God. Baptism “in the Spirit” is what happened to the apostles on Pentecost, when they were filled with the power and boldness of God. They were baptized—immersed or plunged—into the life of the Holy Spirit, who then worked his wonders in them and through them, just as he wants to do for us.

Scripture tells us that our God is a “consuming fire” (Exodus 24:17; Isaiah 33:14; Hebrews 12:29). This baptism by the Spirit and fire is God’s way of setting a fire in our hearts so that we will want to go out and share his love. It’s his way of making us more like Jesus, who wanted to please the Father in everything he said and did. It’s his way of building his Church—by empowering his people to do the works that Jesus did. What an honor to receive the Spirit this way!

“Holy Spirit, come and purify me. Set my heart on fire so that I can be your witness today.”

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Questions for Reflection or Discussion:

1. The first reading contains a prophecy regarding a new Davidic king who will establish a new kingdom. It goes on to describe justice as one of the hallmarks of his kingdom and his rule.
 - In what ways has Jesus fulfilled the prophetic words of the first reading?
 - How would you describe the principal hallmark of your relationship with God and others?
 - How can you make justice a greater part of these relationships?
2. Also in the first reading, the seven gifts of the Spirit are mentioned. Jesus, as the perfect man, received the fullness of the Spirit and these spiritual gifts.
 - In what way are these gifts intended for you as well?
 - Are you open to praying for yourself and others during Advent to receive a deeper infilling of the Holy Spirit and a greater manifestation of his gifts? If not, why not?
3. The responsorial psalm also speaks of a king, and the king's son, who "shall govern your people with justice and your afflicted ones with judgment." Similar to the first reading, it goes on to say that "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."
 - As a disciple of Christ, what steps can you take this Advent to mirror his actions towards the poor, the afflicted, and the lowly?
4. In the second reading, St. Paul tells of the value of the Scriptures in our lives, for it was "written for our instruction, that by endurance and by the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope."
 - How often do you turn to the Scriptures for "encouragement" and "hope" as Paul suggests?
 - What steps can you take during Advent to increase the time you spend reading Scripture.
5. With these words, St. Paul also prays for us to have greater unity and harmony with others: "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."
 - How can you be a greater source of unity and harmony during Advent in your family -- and with neighbors, fellow workers, friends, Christians of other denominations, and non-Christians?
6. In the Gospel, John the Baptist tells us not only to "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand," but also to "Produce good fruit as evidence of your repentance."
 - What do you think this means?
 - What is the fruit the Lord is asking you to bear in your life?
7. The meditation is a reflection on Matthew 3:11 from the Gospel reading where John the Baptists speaks these words about the coming of Jesus: "He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire." The meditation ends with these words: "Scripture tells us that our God is a "consuming fire" (Exodus 24:17; Isaiah 33:14; Hebrews 12:29). This baptism by the Spirit and fire is God's way of setting a fire in our hearts so that we will want to go out and share his love. It's his way of making us more like Jesus, who wanted to please the Father in everything he said and did. It's his way of building his Church—by empowering his people to do the works that Jesus did. What an honor to receive the Spirit this way!"
 - What steps can you take to open yourself to a deeper infilling of the Holy Spirit so that you "will want to go out and share his love"?
8. Take some time now to pray and ask for a fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit during Advent and to set your heart aflame with the love of God and neighbor. Use the prayer below from the meditation as a starting point.

"Holy Spirit, come and purify me. Set my heart on fire so that I can be your witness today."

[The discussion questions were created by Maurice Blumberg, who is in partner relations for **The Word Among Us Partners**, (<http://www.waupartners.org/>); a ministry of **The Word Among Us** (www.wau.org) to the military, prisoners, women with crisis pregnancies or who have had abortions, and college students. He is also As posted on the Catholic Charismatic Renewal National Service Committee's website: www.nsc-chariscenter.org

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