

SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT

December 4, 2016 A

Opening prayer: *Father in heaven, our hearts desire the warmth of your love and our minds are searching for the light of your Word. Increase our longing for Christ our Savior and give us the strength to grow in love, that the dawn of his coming may find us rejoicing in his presence and welcoming the light of his truth. This we ask through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Sharing life: What are you most and least grateful for this week?

Facilitator reads focus statement: There is a shift in focus from the Second Coming of the Lord to his historical birth as the season unfolds. Today's first reading blends the two, but reflects a growing emphasis on the coming of the Messiah. Isaiah's disillusionment with the kings of his own time leads him to dream about an ideal king who will rule the people with the mind and heart of God. In the Gospel, John the Baptist is preparing the people for the coming of the ideal or messianic King. In the second reading, Paul tells his readers that Christ is the fulfillment of God's promise to the Israelites.

Read the assigned Scripture readings, pausing briefly after each one. Consider going over the commentary after each reading, if you have not done so prior to your meeting.

FIRST READING: Isaiah 11:1-10

Disillusioned with King Ahaz, a contemporary of Isaiah, the prophet assures his people that God will raise up a faithful King who will rule his people with the mind and heart of God. This new King will come from the "stump of Jesse" (David's father). "Stump" implies that the house of Jesse and his descendants have been cut down and the monarchy has been defeated. But appearances are deceptive, for out of this seemingly defeated stump will sprout a shoot—a new plant upon which the spirit of the Lord will rest. Even though Isaiah most likely has in mind the yet-to-be born King Hezekiah who will reign close to his time, Christians see Christ as the ideal King spoken of by Isaiah.

There are several divine gifts that will be bestowed on the future King to enable him to rule in a way that is pleasing to God. (We learn about these "Isaian gifts" of the Spirit when preparing for the sacrament of Confirmation.)

Isaiah dreams or imagines a time when a wonderful peace will reign in the land of Israel. Enemies will live in harmony with each other. The King springing from the stump of Jesse will be so divinely inspired that even the Gentiles will seek him out.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM 72

In this royal psalm, the psalmist asks God to bless the King, especially with justice, so that he in turn can

bless his people and help them to experience justice and peace in their lives.

SECOND READING: Romans 15:4-9

Paul is writing to a community comprising both Jewish and Gentile Christians, with very dedicated followers of Christ and some not so dedicated. Paul strongly exhorts all members of the Roman Christian community to be patient with each other and to live together in "perfect harmony," accepting each other as Christ accepts them. Their unity and mutual respect glorify God.

GOSPEL: Matthew 3:1-12

Each year on the second Sunday of Advent, we meet John the Baptist out in the desert where he is preparing large crowds for the coming of Jesus. His message is a call to repentance. The "repentance" John calls for does not concern attention to the externals of one's religion, but rather a total change of mind and heart which would manifest itself in "good fruits" like prayerfulness and justice in one's relationships with others. Such a change of heart and behavior would prepare people to welcome the Messiah and his message.

John shows little patience for the insincere Pharisees who step forward for his baptism. In his eyes, they do not manifest the "true fruits of repentance." They are just going through the motions of conversion, perhaps to look good in the eyes of people who are so drawn to John's message.

It would seem that when Matthew was writing his Gospel to a largely Jewish audience about 50 years after Jesus' death, there may have been some competition between the followers of John and the followers of Jesus. Matthew wants to make it very clear that true disciples of John should also be disciples of Jesus, since John himself was a disciple of Jesus and regarded his ministry as inferior to that of Jesus.

Finally, references to 'winnowing fan,' 'fire,' and 'ax' speak of a coming judgment when the truly converted will be separated from the unconverted. We too are called to repent as a way of preparing our hearts for the coming of the Lord.

FAITH-SHARING QUESTIONS

1. What verse or image spoke to you most? Why?
2. In the first and second readings, Isaiah and Paul dreamed of a world in which all people could live in harmony with one another. What are some of the common things that often keep you from living in harmony with others? What helps you to overcome these obstacles to peace?
3. What would arouse John the Baptist's wrath today? How do you think John would be received by *us* today?
4. What are signs or fruits of a life converted to Christ?

RESPONDING TO THE WORD

Name one way you can act on this Sunday's readings. Suggestions: Spend some serious time asking the Holy Spirit to help you to see what attitudes or behaviors need changing in your life. If there is some relationship in your life that needs to be restored to peace, pray about what steps you can take to make this happen.

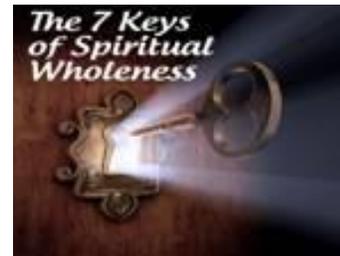
CONCLUDE WITH PRAYERS OF PETITION AND INTERCESSION

Pray for the grace of true repentance. Pray for the grace to make a good confession this Advent season.

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A Day of Reflection

January 7, 2017, 8 am – 3 pm

Holy Name of Jesus Parish Indialantic, FL

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