

Now is the Time!

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2nd Sunday of Advent Now is the Time!

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Lessons and Discussions

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“the word of God came to John the son of Zechariah in the desert”

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“all flesh shall see the salvation of God”

Introit Entrance Antiphon – Roman Missal

This should be chanted so that the time of prayer, study and discussion can be made sacred.

Populus Sion *Cf. Is 30: 19, 30*

VII

P Eople of Zi-on behold, * the Lord is coming to
save all na-tions; and the Lord shall cause you to hear
his ma-jes-tic voice for the joy of your heart.

Alternate options:

- Lo, How a Rose E'er Blooming
- On Jordan's Bank the Baptist's Cry
- Healer of My Soul
- Holiness (Take my Heart)
- Prepare the Way

Collect – Roman Missal

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.
Amen

Almighty and merciful God,
may no earthly undertaking hinder those
who set out in haste to meet your Son,
but may our learning of heavenly wisdom
gain us admittance to his company.
Who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one
God, for ever and ever.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.
Amen

V. Pray for us, O holy Mother of God

R. That we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ.

“The End” Notes

- [1] Footnotes NAB 3, 1-20
- [2] Footnotes NAB 3, 1
- [3] cf. Jerome Biblical Commentary
- [4] Footnotes NAB 3, 1-20
- [5] Footnotes NAB 3, 1
- [6] ibid
- [7] ibid
- [8] Magnificat, Vol. 14, No. 10/December 2012
- [9] CCC 523
- [10] Galatians 4:4-5
- [11] CCC 522
- [12] CCC 514
- [13] Mark 1:14-15
- [14] CCC 524
- [15] Hardon, Modern Catholic Dictionary, pg. 131
- [16] Catechism of the Catholic Church - 776
- [17] Hardon, Modern Catholic Dictionary, pg. 131
- [18] Divine Intimacy Vol. 1, pg. 41
- [19] Catechism of the Catholic Church - 720
- [20] Divine Intimacy Vol. 1, pg. 41
- [21] Divine Intimacy Vol. 1, pg. 41
- [22] Phil. 1:9-10
- [23] John Paul II, Parc des Princes, 1 June 1980
- [24] Divine Intimacy Vol. 1, pg. 41
- [25] St. Bernard, Sermon 3, Christmas Eve, 10
- [26] Fernandez, In Conversation with God, 1, 9.1
- [27] Fernandez, In Conversation with God, 1, 9.1
- [28] Pope Pius XII, Radio Message to the U.S. National Catechetical Congress in Boston (October 26, 1946): Discorsi e Radiomessaggi VIII (1946) 288.
- [29] Fernandez, In Conversation with God, 1, 9.1
- [30] John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation, Reconciliatio et Paenitentia, 2 December 1984, 18
- [31] Fernandez, In Conversation with God, 1, 9.1
- [32] Fernandez, In Conversation with God, 1, 9.1
- [33] Fernandez, In Conversation with God, 1, 9.1
- [34] Fernandez, In Conversation with God, 1, 10.3
- [35] <http://linktoliturgy.com/index.cfm?load=page&page=1511>
- [36] Fernandez, In Conversation with God, 1, 10.3
- [37] Fernandez, In Conversation with God, 1, 10.3
- [38] 1 Cor. 12:26
- [39] John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation, Reconciliatio et Paenitentia, 2 December 1984, 16
- [40] Fernandez, In Conversation with God, 1, 10.3
- [41] Fernandez, In Conversation with God, 1, 10.3

Gospel Reading – Luke 3:1-6 – Roman Missal

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke
- Glory to you O Lord

In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias was tetrarch of Abilene, during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John the son of Zechariah in the desert. John went throughout the whole region of the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, as it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah: *A voice of one crying out in the desert: "Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths. Every valley shall be filled and every mountain and hill shall be made low. The winding roads shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth, and all flesh shall see the salvation of God."*

The Gospel of the Lord.
- Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ

Spiritual Reading – Office of Readings – 2nd Sunday of Advent - Cycle C

From a commentary on Isaiah by Eusebius of Caesarea, bishop
The voice in the wilderness
The voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight the paths of our God. The prophecy makes clear that it is to be fulfilled, not in Jerusalem but in the wilderness: it is there that the glory of the Lord is to appear, and God's salvation is to be made known to all mankind.

It was in the wilderness that God's saving presence was proclaimed by John the Baptist, and there that God's salvation was seen. The words of this prophecy were fulfilled when Christ and his glory were made manifest to all: after his baptism the heavens opened, and the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove rested on him, and the Father's voice was heard, bearing witness to the Son: This is my beloved Son, listen to him.

The prophecy meant that God was to come to a deserted place, inaccessible from the beginning. None of the pagans had any knowledge of God, since his holy servants and prophets were

kept from approaching them. The voice commands that a way be prepared for the Word of God: the rough and trackless ground is to be made level, so that our God may find a highway when he comes. Prepare the way of the Lord: the way is the preaching of the Gospel, the new message of consolation, ready to bring to all mankind the knowledge of God's saving power.

Climb on a high mountain, bearer of good news to Zion. Lift up your voice in strength, bearer of good news to Jerusalem. These words harmonize very well with the meaning of what has gone before. They refer opportunely to the evangelists and proclaim the coming of God to men, after speaking of the voice crying in the wilderness. Mention of the evangelists suitably follows the prophecy on John the Baptist.

Responsory – Office of Readings

The herald of the Lord approaches, of whom the Lord says:

– No one born of woman is greater than John the Baptist.

Truly this is a great prophet, and more than a prophet, of whom the Lord says:

– No one born of woman is greater than John the Baptist.

Now is the Time – Lesson and Discussion

“the word of God came to John the son of Zechariah in the desert”

Often, when we consider the timing of an event in history, we wonder why *that* time, rather than 10 year later, or 100 years earlier. In today's Gospel reading, Luke gives a very detailed historical account of people that help set the stage for John the Baptist and ultimately the coming of Christ. We will explore the people Luke brings up and why John the Baptist and Jesus come on the scene when they do.

Why does Luke put the writing of Isaiah in his gospel? “In doing so, he presents his theme of the universality of salvation, which he has announced earlier in the words of Simeon (2, 30-32).”[1]

Who is Tiberius Caesar? Tiberius was the ruler (or Caesar) of Rome. “Tiberius succeeded Augustus as emperor in 14 A.D. and reigned until 37 A.D. The fifteenth year of his reign, depending on the method of calculating his first regal year, would have fallen between 27-29 A.D. Luke's gospel gives us one of the most

Marian Antiphon – Alma Redemptoris Mater

Alma Redemptoris Mater (English Translation)

Loving mother of the Redeemer, open door to heaven and star of the sea, come quickly to the aid of thy people, fallen indeed but striving to stand again. To nature's astonishment thou wert the mother of thy holy Creator without ceasing to be a virgin, and heard from Gabriel that greeting: "Hail." Have pity on us sinners.

V. The Angel of the Lord declared unto Mary.

R. And she conceived by the Holy Spirit.

Let us pray. Pour forth, we beseech Thee, O Lord, Thy grace into our hearts, that we to whom the incarnation of Christ Thy Son was made know by the message of an angel may, by His Passion and Cross, be brought to the glory of His resurrection. Through the same Christ our Lord. Amen

winter, and through the mighty orbs of time, folding and refolding upon themselves, as the stars still recur to their first conjunctions, maintains, so far as mere visible matter allows, the mighty constancy of things. God, by whose laws the choice of the soul is free, and to the good rewards and to the evil pains are distributed by necessities settled throughout all natures. Who hast made man after Thine image and likeness, as he who has come to know himself discovers. Hear me, hear me, graciously hear me, my God, my

Lord, my King, my Father, my Cause, my Hope, my Wealth, my Honor, my House, my Country, my Health, my Light, my Life. Hear, hear, hear me graciously, in that way, all Thine own, which though known to few is to those few known so well.

Henceforth Thee alone do I love, Thee alone I follow, Thee alone I seek, Thee alone am I prepared to serve, for Thou alone art rightly Lord, and of Thy lordship I desire to be. Direct, I pray, and command whatever Thou wilt, but heal and open my ears, that I may hear Thine utterances. Heal and open my eyes, that I may behold the signs of thy command. Drive delusion from me, that I may recognize Thee. O Lord, most merciful Father receive, I pray, Thy fugitive; enough already, surely, have I been punished, long enough have I served Thine enemies, whom Thou hast under Thy feet, long enough has error had its way with me. To Thee I feel I must return: I knock; may Thy door be opened to me; teach me the way to Thee.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

accurate historical dates when he references the “fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar”[2].

Who was Pontius Pilate? As the scriptures point out, he was the “procurator” (not really the “governor”)[3] of Judea beginning in 26 AD – 36 AD. “The Jewish historian Josephus describes him as a greedy and ruthless prefect who had little regard for the local Jewish population and their religious practices.”[4]

Who was Herod? This specific “Herod” Luke is speaking of is Herod Antipas. The word “Herod” was used as a title just like “Ceasar” was used as a title. “Herod Antipas, the son of Herod the Great. He ruled over Galilee and Perea from 4 B.C. to 39 A.D. His official title *tetrarch* means literally, ‘ruler of a quarter,’ but came to designate any subordinate prince.”[5]

Who was Philip? Like Herod Antipas, Philip is a son of Herod the Great, tetrarch of the territory to the north and east of the Sea of Galilee from 4 B.B. to 34 A.D. [6]

Who were the high priests Annas and Caiaphas? “Annas had been high priest 6-15 A.D. After being deposed by the Romans in 15 A.D. he was succeeded by various members of his family and eventually by his son-in-law, Caiaphas, who was high priest 18-36 A.D.”[7]

Why does Luke list the names of Pilate, Herod, Annas, and Caiaphas? The names Pilate, Herod, Annas, and Caiaphas appear at both the birth and crucifixion of Our Lord to show the link between the birth and death of Jesus. “All these names – Pontius Pilate, Herod, Annas and Caiaphas – belong in the Passion of Christ. So then why do we hear them now before his birth? To remind us of why the Lord was born: ‘Jesus Christ was born to die on the cross’ (Saint Leo the Great). The winding road that Christ makes straight is the way to Calvary. With Christ we want to ‘advance secure in the glory of God...with his mercy and justice for company.’ We do that this Advent by living the memory that Christ is born to save us. The ‘affection of Christ Jesus’ moves us to embrace every sacrifice that prepares in us the way of the cross. In Christ’s flesh ‘all flesh sees the salvation of God.’”[8]

Who is John the Baptist? He was the last and the first of the prophets in that his mission was to announce not only the coming of the Messiah, but also to be the first to proclaim that the

Messiah has arrived. “*St. John the Baptist* is the Lord’s immediate precursor or forerunner, sent to prepare his way. ‘Prophet of the Most High’, John surpasses all the prophets, of whom he is the last. He inaugurates the Gospel, already from his mother’s womb welcomes the coming of Christ, and rejoices in being ‘the friend of the bridegroom’, whom he points out as ‘the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world’. Going before Jesus ‘in the spirit and power of Elijah’, John bears witness to Christ in his preaching, by his Baptism of conversion, and through his martyrdom.”[9]

See Link to Liturgy Lessons:

Lesson - John the Baptist

Lesson - John the Baptist: Link between the O.T. and the N.T.

Why does the word of God come to John when it did? The simple answer is because it is exactly when God wanted it to happen, but to answer the larger overall question of exactly *why then*, only God can answer. Similarly, we ask a logical follow up question: “why does Jesus come into this world when he did?” God willed the time of Christ’s coming and as it says in Scripture, Jesus came in the “fullness of time”. “But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to ransom those under the law, so that we might receive adoption.”[10]

Today, we are able to see the events of salvation through a much wider lens, knowing the events leading up to Christ’s life and the 2000 years following. We can objectively look at history and see now that Jesus came when He did in order to fulfill every prophecy that was made by God through the prophets. “The coming of God’s Son to earth is an event of such immensity that God willed to prepare for it over centuries. He makes everything converge on Christ: all the rituals and sacrifices, figures and symbols of the ‘First Covenant’. He announces him through the mouths of the prophets who succeeded one another in Israel. Moreover, he awakens in the hearts of the pagans a dim expectation of this coming.”[11] Ultimately though, we will never fully know or understand because we are not God. God is outside of time. He sees the beginning, the middle, and the end.

On a similar note, we must recognize that the entire life of Christ, not just His arrival in history, is a mystery; “Many things about Jesus of interest to human curiosity do not figure in the Gospels. Almost nothing is said about his hidden life at Naza-

the same time to tighten the bonds of brotherhood. Ought we not to go to this Sacrament more joyfully and more regularly when we know that by the very fact of making a good Confession we are helping so many other Christians, and especially those who are closet to us?”[41]

Profession of Faith or Popular Devotion – Prayer of Conversion

This is a prayer from St. Augustine

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

O God, Framer of the universe, grant me first rightly to invoke Thee; then to show myself worthy to be heard by Thee; lastly, deign to set me free. God, through whom all things which of themselves were not, tend to be. God, who out of nothing hast created this world, which the eyes of all perceive to be most beautiful. God, the Father of truth, the Father of wisdom, the Father of the true and crowning life, the Father of blessedness, the Father of that which is good and fair, the Father of intelligible light, the Father of our awakening and illumination, the Father of the pledge by which we are admonished to return to Thee.

God, from whom to be turned away, is to fall: to whom to be turned back, is to rise again: in whom to abide, is to stand firm. God, from whom to go forth, is to die: to whom to return, is to revive: in whom to have our dwelling, is to live. God, whom no one loses, unless deceived: whom no one seeks, unless stirred up: whom no one finds, unless made pure. God, by whom we distinguish good from ill. God, by whom we flee evil, and follow good. God, who leadest us to the door of life. God, who causeth it to be opened to them that knock. God, who givest us the bread of life. God, who cleansest us, and preparest us for Divine rewards, come graciously to me.

Thou the only God, come unto my help. God, whom all things serve, that serve, to whom is compliant every virtuous soul. By whose laws the poles revolve, the stars fulfill their courses, the sun enlivens the day, the moon tempers the night: and all the framework of things, day after day by turns of light and gloom, month after month by waxings and wanings of the moon, year after year by unceasing order of spring and summer and fall and

body...The saints in Heaven, the holy souls in Purgatory, and the Church which is still on pilgrimage through this world rejoice together every time an absolution is given.”[36]

We have to realize that sin is never just a personal, private thing that only affects a singular person—it affects everyone. “The greatest tragedy in any man’s life is sin, because the result of sin is a far-reaching disorder which starts in the very center of his being and spreads outward to affect all those around him.”[37] We should listen to the words of Saint Paul when he said, “If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.”[38]

To drive the point home, our late Holy Father, Blessed Pope John Paul II said, “This is the other aspect of that solidarity which, on the religious level, is developed in the profound and magnificent mystery of the ‘Communion of Saints’, thanks to which it has been possible to say that ‘every soul that rises above itself raises up the world’. To this ‘law of ascent’ there unfortunately corresponds the ‘law of descent’. Consequently one can speak of a ‘communion of sin’, whereby a soul that lowers itself through sin drags down itself, the Church and, in some way, the whole world. In other words there is no sin, not even the most intimate and secret one, that exclusively concerns the person committing it. With greater or lesser violence, with greater or lesser harm, every sin has repercussions on the entire ecclesial body and on the whole human family.”[39]

How does Confession benefit the Church and others as a whole? We must never forget we are all one body of Christ and see the joyous benefits of going to the Sacrament of Penance and the joy the whole Church has not just here on earth, but also in Heaven. “...when a Christian goes to Confession, the whole Church receives an incalculable benefit. Every time a priest pronounces the words of absolution, She rejoices and is mysteriously enriched, because every Confession, through the Communion of Saints, sends blessings which resound through the whole Mystical Body of Christ.”[40]

“In the intimate life of the Church...every member supports all the others with his good works and merits, and is at the same time supported by them. We all need to be, and in fact we all are, continually receiving a share of the spiritual benefits which are common to us all. Our own merits are helping our fellow men in every part of the world...To loosen’ the chains of sin is at

reth, and even a great part of his public life is not recounted. What is written in the Gospels was set down there ‘so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name.’”[12]

What is the “fullness of time” in our lives? We can become very anxious in life, especially as we discern God’s will for our lives. We either want to know God’s will now, and are not patient as God reveals His will to us, or perhaps God *has* revealed His will, but it is not what we will so we continue to discern, ignoring the obvious. When we are discerning God’s will for our lives, we must be patient, but then when He reveals it to us, we must not hesitate to act. Saint John the Baptist and our Blessed Mother did not hesitate to act once the “fullness of time” had taken place. Our Lord affirms the message and mission of Saint John the Baptist when He says, “After John had been arrested, Jesus came to Galilee proclaiming the gospel of God: This is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel.”[13]

Why is it important to not hesitate to act when the “fullness of time” occurs? Time is important to our temporal life. If we are baking cookies and the fullness of the cooking time occurs, we must act by taking out the cookies or they will burn. A running back must run through the hole created by his linemen at just the right time, or he will be tackled. God is eternal but works in our temporal life. Therefore like Saint John the Baptist and our Blessed Mother, we must act at the right time.

The Church reminds us each Advent season to be ready *now!* The time for us to repent and make straight our paths for the coming of our Lord is *now!* It was not just for people 2,000 years ago or for people in the future, but for us today! “When the Church celebrates *the liturgy of Advent* each year, she makes present this ancient expectancy of the Messiah, for by sharing in the long preparation for the Savior’s first coming, the faithful renew their ardent desire for his second coming. By celebrating the precursor’s birth and martyrdom, the Church unites herself to his desire: ‘He must increase, but I must decrease.’”[14]

Jesus was born “so that we might receive adoption” as Saint Paul says. Each of us has been created as a son or daughter of God, and in response we are called individually to call God “Our Father”. Each time we pray the “Our Father” we are affirming that we indeed have chosen to receive this adoption that was

presented in the “fullness of time”, a fullness that extends to each individual.

Call to Conversion – Lesson and Discussion

“Prepare the way of the Lord”

John begins his mission by calling upon everyone to prepare the way of the Lord. He instructs us to have our hearts and minds ready to receive the Messiah who is already among us to bring the Kingdom of God.

What is “conversion”? Conversion can be defined as “any turning or changing from a state of sin to repentance, from a lax to a fervent way of life, from unbelief to faith, and from a non-Christian religion to Christianity. Since the Second Vatican Council the term is not used to describe a non-Catholic Christian becoming a Catholic. The preferred term is ‘entering into full communion with the Church.’”[15]

How would someone already in full communion with the Church have a conversion? It is within the Church, because of her teachings, Sacraments, moral life, liturgy, and prayer, that intense change and perfection of the soul can occur. The Church is the hospital for sinners. When a person is physically ill, much can be done within the person’s home to make them well. If they are in need of the hospital, much can be done within the ambulance to make them well, but it is at the hospital that they can get the care they need. When a person is spiritually ill, much can be done through the natural virtues and God’s means of extraordinary graces, but the soul gets the care it needs within the Church through the theological virtues and the ordinary means of graces which God offers through the Church, which is the instrument Our Lord established for the salvation of men. The Church is Christ’s “instrument for the salvation of all,” ‘the universal sacrament of salvation,’ by which Christ is ‘at once manifesting and actualizing the mystery of God’s love for men.’ The Church ‘is the visible plan of God’s love for humanity,’ because God desires ‘that the whole human race may become one People of God, form one Body of Christ, and be built up into one temple of the Holy Spirit.’”[16]

What does it mean to be “converted”? “One who with the help of divine grace undergoes a significant spiritual change for the better. In all cases the change must be deeply interior and represent a change of mind and heart to qualify as a true conver-

How do we grow closer to Christ? “Prayer, mortification (fasting), and good example will always form the basis of the Christian apostolate. The more petition for others is backed by the sanctity of the suppliant, the more certain it is to be answered.”[32]

How can we help our friends go to the Sacrament of Penance? “Sometimes we will have to help them, with tact and kindness, make a good examination of conscience. Sometimes we will accompany them to the place where confessions are being heard. At other times again, a word of encouragement and affection will suffice, accompanied by a brief and properly-prepared instruction about the nature and value of the sacrament. What joy each time we get a relative, a colleague, a friend, to receive the sacrament of divine mercy! This same joy is shared in Heaven by our Father God and by all the blessed.”[33]

What happens in the Sacrament of Penance? “In the Sacrament of Penance man is reconciled with God and with the Church. It is one of the most intimate and personal of human acts, and brings about many fundamental changes in the sanctuary of each man’s conscience... In the Sacrament of Penance Our Lord sorts out all those misplaced elements; in addition to pardoning the sins, he restores to the soul its lost order and harmony.”[34]

How do we prepare ourselves and help others prepare for the Sacrament of Penance? “We say in the Act of Contrition, ‘I firmly resolve, with the help of Thy grace, to confess my sins, to do penance, and to amend my life.’ *The Sacrament of Reconciliation includes five steps: Examination of Conscience, Sorrow for Sins, Resolve to sin no more, Confession to a priest, and Penance.* We must have the desire or resolve to avoid sin and amend our lives.”[35]

Can we force someone to go to confession? No. One must want forgiveness and at the very minimum be sorry for their sins in order to be forgiven. The old saying “You can lead a horse to water but you can’t make him drink.” We can present God’s love and mercy and try and help lead them into a want to be forgiven, but if a soul is not ready then God will not force His way in.

What are the benefits of leading others to penance? “Whenever anybody makes a sincere and repentant Confession it is a moment of rejoicing not only for the penitent but for every-

know the way ourselves.”[29]

What is the sense of sin and how do we lose it? Blessed Pope John Paul II wrote in 1984, “Over the course of generations, the Christian mind has gained from the Gospel as it is read in the ecclesial community a fine sensitivity and an acute perception of the seeds of death contained in sin, as well as a sensitivity and an acuteness of perception for identifying them in the thousand guises under which sin shows itself. This is what is commonly called the sense of sin. This sense is rooted in man's moral conscience and is as it were its thermometer. It is linked to the sense of God, since it derives from man's conscious relationship with God as his creator, Lord and Father. Hence, just as it is impossible to eradicate completely the sense of God or to silence the conscience completely, so the sense of sin is never completely eliminated. Nevertheless, it happens not infrequently in history, for more or less lengthy periods and under the influence of many different factors, that the moral conscience of many people becomes seriously clouded. ‘Have we the right idea of conscience?’ - I asked two years ago in an address to the faithful - ‘Is it not true that modern man is threatened by an eclipse of conscience?’ Too many signs indicate that such an eclipse exists in our time. This is all the more disturbing in that conscience, defined by the council as ‘the most secret core and sanctuary of a man,’ is ‘strictly related to human freedom...For this reason conscience, to a great extent, constitutes the basis of man's interior dignity and, at the same time, of his relationship to God.’ It is inevitable therefore that in this situation there is an obscuring also of the sense of sin, which is closely connected with the moral conscience, the search for truth and the desire to make a responsible use of freedom. When the conscience is weakened the sense of God is also obscured, and as a result, with the loss of this decisive inner point of reference, the sense of sin is lost. This explains why my predecessor Pius XII one day declared, in words that have almost become proverbial, that ‘the sin of the century is the loss of the sense of sin.’”[30]

Why do we personally have to know the way to repentance ourselves? If we do not know the way, how in the world are we supposed to lead others? It would be like the blind leading the blind. “We must have interior life. We have to talk to Jesus and strive, ourselves, to improve in those very things in which our friends have to improve. We must have an unshakeable hope in the supernatural means.”[31] Our holiness will be the greatest witness to others.

sion.”[17] “To be converted means to purify oneself from sin, straighten crookedness of heart and mind, shore up the sinking ground of inconstancy and caprice, knock down pretenses of pride, conquer the resistance of selfishness and destroy acrimony in our relations with our neighbor: it means, in short, to make our life a straight path which leads to God without crookedness or compromise.”[18]

As we undergo the spiritual change of conversion, we conform more to the Divine likeness, which is what John the Baptist’s preaching ushers in. “Finally, with John the Baptist, the Holy Spirit begins the restoration to man of ‘the divine likeness,’ prefiguring what he would achieve with and in Christ. John’s baptism was for repentance; baptism in water and the Spirit will be a new birth.”[19] It is not enough to be physically born; we must reach our full physical potential. In the same manner it is not enough to be spiritually born, we must reach our full spiritual potential, which is being restored to the divine likeness from which and for which we were created.

Can a person have more than one conversion? Yes, in fact, we are called to do so! With each conversion, rather than returning to the same spot we were once at, we become closer to the heart of God. “It is not a program to be exhausted in one Advent, but one which is to be carried out every Advent in a new and deeper way in order to make ourselves more ready for the coming of our Savior.”[20]

What are the responsibilities for personal conversion? Besides our personal growth towards Christ it, “also includes the duty of working for the good of one’s brothers and of the community; such is the conclusion we should draw from the second reading.”[21] Saint Paul rejoices with the Philippians when they began to spread the Gospel. Likewise, Christ will rejoice with us the more we spread the saving faith in Him, because we, in turn, grow deeper and deeper in love with Him. “And this is my prayer: that your love may increase ever more and more in the knowledge and every kind of perception, to discern what is of value, so that you may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ...”[22]

How does one have a conversion? As Blessed Pope John Paul II said we must, “Open the gates wide to Christ! Take the risk of following him. Obviously this demands that you should come out of yourselves, or your own way of reasoning, or your pru-

dence. It demands that you leave behind your indifference, your self-sufficiency, those un-Christian habits that you have perhaps acquired. Yes; that demands renunciation, a conversion, which first of all you must want to want; want to pray for in your prayer, and want to put into practice. Let Christ be for you the way, the truth, and the life. Let Him be your salvation and your happiness. Let him take over the whole of your life so that with Him you can live it in all its dimensions. Let all your relationships, activities, feelings, thoughts, be integrated in Him, or, so to speak, 'Christified'. I wish that with Christ you may come to recognize God as the beginning and end of your existence.”[23]

“However we need to remember that our personal salvation and that of others is much more the work of God than of man. Man must collaborate diligently, but it is God who both begins the good work and carries it to completion. It is only with the help of grace that man can be rich ‘with the harvest of justice’ on the final day, because justice, that is, holiness, is acquired only ‘in Christ Jesus’ by opening oneself with humility and trust to his sanctifying action.”[24] God is both our beginning (Our Creator) and our end (Our Beatitude). It is God, as Saint Thomas Aquinas prays, who “points out the beginning, directs the progress, and brings about the completion”. This is similar to a spiritual GPS, which acquires satellites to find the beginning, direct progress, and keep the destination always in focus in order to bring about the completion.

Do we listen to God as he points out our beginning, directs the progress, and brings about the completion? It is when we cooperate with God that conversion takes place. Conversion is not just going “off course”, recalculating, and then getting back “on course”. Conversion is also the process of staying “on course” at all times. Saint Augustine says that we must stay on the “boat” which is the Church. If we stay on the boat we will be saved. It is hard to stay on the boat because it requires us to submit our wills to something greater than ourselves. It is also hard to stay on the boat because there are many influences and temptations calling us off the boat. We must look to those who have faithfully stayed the course of God.

Who can we look to as examples of conversion? There are many men and women who have had amazing conversions to Christ. Sts. Augustine and Therese have beautiful stories of coming to Christ. Of course we can always look to Mary for conversion “because it is the will of God that we should have noth-

ing which has not passed through the hands of Mary.”[25] **Who in your life do you know has had a conversion? How can we further our own conversions? How can we help others in their conversions?**

MOVIE – Restless Heart – POP CULTURE CONNECTION - 7:29

<http://youtu.be/DuSWNIy7YG4>

This is a clip of the true story of Saint Augustine. Augustine was a man of sin. He had broken every commandment, and for a time not be ashamed of it. However, through a powerful conversion, and his mother praying for him for thirty years, He converted, and became a bishop, saint, and doctor of the Church.

Bringing Others to Repentance – Lesson and Discussion

“all flesh shall see the salvation of God”

“The Messiah is very close to us, and during these days of Advent we should get ready to receive him in a new way when Christmas comes.”[26] We can do this by going to confession and inviting other to join us. In many dioceses, throughout Advent there are several penance services at churches, in addition to normal confession times. Sadly, many people have not been to confession since their first reconciliation. One of the precepts of the Catholic Church is to go to confession at least once a year. “In many cases, bringing our friends closer to Christ means taking them to receive the sacrament of Penance, one of the greatest treasures Our Lord has left to his Church. Perhaps no way of helping friends is as great as making it easy for them to go to Confession.”[27]

Why is repentance difficult for us and for others? There are various reasons as to why people do not want to go to confession, but it boils down to two main factors: the loss of the sense of sin and being paralyzed in our sin. Indeed, Pope Pius the XII said, “the greatest sin of the century is the loss of the sense of sin.”[28] Many people don’t repent because they do not know sin and aren’t aware that they are sinning. Those who know they are sinning may still not go to confession because they are paralyzed in their sin, fearful of coming back in the mercy of God. “Every day we meet friends, colleagues, relatives who have lost their sense of what is most essential to their very existence. They feel unable to go towards Our Lord, and they walk along the paths of life as though paralyzed, because they have lost hope. We have to show them the way to the humble cave in Bethlehem. There they will find the meaning of their lives. To do this we have to