



Homily for 12/6/2020

Second Sunday of Advent

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*Prepare Ye the Way of the Lord!*

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In the Gospel today we hear the clarion call that rings out every advent season, “Prepare the way of the Lord!” St. John the Baptist is the forerunner of the Christ. He is the last of the prophets of the Old Testament and the first of believers in Jesus the Messiah, the promised anointed one who came not only to redeem Israel but to save all humanity, Jews and Gentiles alike. Every generation since then has picked up this call to turn towards the Lord and to look to He-who-wills-to save-us from sin and death. That very same saving God is present to us here today. Through our own baptism, we have entered the Jordan River with Christ and emerged a beloved child of God most high. Through our confirmation, the Holy Spirit of God has come down upon us confirming the Father’s love for us. Through the Holy Sacrifice offered on this altar, we share in the Saving Sacrifice offered once for all on Calvary when the blood of the Lamb of God was shed for our salvation. From this Saving Sacrifice, we are also fed by His Flesh and Blood coming to us in the form of bread and wine, the outward signs of the memorial sacrifice He willed to be instituted in remembrance of Him. Here in the Eucharist, God is with us. But we must prepare a way for Him to enter into our hearts if He is to bear fruit in our lives.

I have been preaching for the past two weeks on the importance of the way we receive our Eucharistic Lord. We believe that He is truly present here, body, blood, soul and divinity. But we should always do an examination upon the manner in which we express this Catholic faith in the Real Presence. Actions speak louder than words. If a stranger walked into the Church today, would he know what it is we profess to believe by observing the manner in which we receive the Eucharist?

John the Baptist’s call to prepare the way of the Lord should be that yearly reminder to do an examination on our Eucharistic piety and devotion. Behold, the bridegroom of our soul desires to enter into our hearts through holy communion. He wants to be born in our hearts, conceived in our souls. He wants to heal what is broken, set straight what is crooked. Look, our God comes to save us! Come out to meet Him! But what does that look like? In the pastor’s notes for the past two weeks, I have attempted to catechize on the practical aspects of reception of Holy Communion, in order to highlight the great gift that is the Real Presence we enjoy in the Blessed Sacrament. I remind everyone of the Church’s purposeful reiteration of the universal norm of receiving our Eucharistic Lord kneeling and upon the tongue. But in particular, this week, I have made some suggestions if one chooses the option allowed in the United States of receiving Communion upon the hand. This manner of receiving the Blessed Sacrament has been chosen by many these days because of the coronavirus pandemic that has fallen upon us. However, I would like to take the opportunity of this crisis to encourage everyone to make sure that whatever manner we choose to receive our Lord, it is done with the utmost reverence, dignity and loving respect for so great a gift!

I have proposed, for those who choose to receive our Lord in the hand, a practice that might help highlight the precious Body of our Lord and the care and reverence we give to it. For those who would like to take that extra step, I have provided small linen hand corporals in the vestibule. By placing a small linen cloth, not unlike the burial shroud Jesus was buried in, upon the hand we highlight that what we receive is not common food, but rather supernatural food, whose substance is the very Body and Blood of our Savior. Using the linen corporal to receive the Host into one’s hand and then bending the head to consume it with one’s tongue from the corporal makes a very clear distinction that this is something different, set apart, sacred.

Please don’t feel obliged to do it, but also, please don’t feel resistant to trying to do this just because it is different than what you are used to. There is a crisis of faith in our world and even in our Church. So many do not believe in



the Real Presence of God in the Eucharist, and I believe it is, in part, because of the breakdown in Eucharistic piety for the past 60 years. This is just one attempt to do something positive to highlight how good our God is! There are simple instructions in the bulletin and in the vestibule on how to care for and launder the linen cloth. I'm sure we would care for the cloth more than anyone cares for their hands! And that is precisely the point. The way we treat things speaks volumes about the disposition of our hearts.

Now back to the moment of Communion itself. Prepare the way of the Lord! When we consume our God in Holy Communion, the miracle of the Divine Presence within us has just begun. The more I think I about it, the more I am dismayed at the lop-sidedness of Eucharistic practices. We spend an hour *before* communion fasting, we prepare by prayers and listening to the proclaimed Word for half the Mass. Then the Eucharistic Prayer and other prayers of preparation precede the moment of reception. And yet, once we arrive at the Source and Summit of our Christian Life, we so often fail to give it due attention. We tend to eat and run. Where is the thanksgiving that is owed? We are like the nine lepers who were cured and ran off, instead of the one that came back to give thanks for the miracle. Even Socrates, the great pagan philosopher of old, said, "the unexamined life is not worth living." By way of analogy to something far greater, I would say that the unexamined and unmeditated reception of Communion is not worth receiving. A mindless reception of the Bread of Life is not a worthy reception. We have lost the art of making a thanksgiving after Communion. We have lost the art of communing with the God, with whom we have just shared communion. So many have never been taught how to prepare the way of the Lord, that he might enter into the temple He prepared in our souls.

There are so many things to distract us, for sure. But that is one of the reasons I instituted the two minutes of silence after we have finished cleansing the vessels, before the prayer after Communion. It is intentional time so that we might enter into the Holy of Holies of our souls and let the High Priest, Jesus the Christ, sprinkle His blood on us to redeem us and seal the covenant of love with us. This is a time for closing our eyes, bending the knee, or sitting in silence and awe before the great mystery. Now, if you need words to help you enter this mystery, one of our parishioners has produced a beautiful prayer and provided a copy for you in your pew. Feel free to take a card with you. Use it today. Take it home and pray it in remembrance of the last time you received our Lord. But whatever we do, let's not be indifferent to this awesome moment of grace. Prepare the way of the Lord! Make straight His paths. Behold the Lamb of God. Behold the Bridegroom, come out to meet Him. Here is your God . . . Like a shepherd He feeds his flock. Let us be grateful and let our gratitude be manifest in our actions!

May Jesus Christ be Praised!