

Second Sunday of Advent
Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe
La Crosse, Wisconsin
December 10, 2017

Rom 15, 4-13
Mt 11, 2-10

Sermon

Praised be Jesus Christ, now and for ever. Amen.

As we begin the second week of our preparation for the great feast of the Birth of the Lord, we are deeply conscious of the profound preparation which we must make for the worthy celebration of the Coming of Our Lord into the world in our human flesh on Christmas. We prayed in the words of the Collect:

Stir up, O Lord, our hearts to prepare the way of thy only-begotten Son: that
by his coming we may be enabled to serve thee with pure minds.¹

Already, the First Week of Advent has passed, and we ask ourselves: Are our hearts awake and steadfast to welcome ever more fully Our Lord Who came to us at Bethlehem, continues to come to us in His holy Church, especially in the Sacraments of Penance and the Holy Eucharist, and Who will come in glory on the Last Day?

Saint Paul, in his Letter to the Romans, reminds us that every inspired writing of the Holy Scriptures is for our constant growth in understanding the mystery of our salvation, accomplished by the Redemptive Incarnation of Our Lord Who was born at Bethlehem, in order to suffer and die for our eternal salvation at Jerusalem. Our steadfast growth in understanding the Word of God necessarily finds expression in an ever more coherent Christian life, filled with hope and, therefore with fidelity, especially in times of great temptation and trial. God instructs us through His holy Word, in order that we may live ever more coherently in Him, in the union of our minds and hearts with the Mind and Heart of Christ, God the Son Incarnate. Saint Paul instructs us:

¹ “Excita, Domine, corda nostra ad praeparandas Unigeniti tui vias: ut per ejus adventum, purificatis mentibus servire mereamur.” Prosper Guéranger, *The Liturgical Year*, Advent, Vol. 1 (Great Falls, MT: St. Bonaventure Publications, 2000), p. 164. [GuérangerEng].

For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that by steadfastness and by the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. May the God of steadfastness and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another in accord with Christ Jesus, that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.... May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.²

Our faithful living in Christ, in accord with His Word, unfailingly handed down to us in the Church, in Sacred Tradition, leads us securely in the way of joy and peace, in the way of the harmony among men who are all called to salvation in Christ, to be one with one another in Him Who alone is our salvation.

Saint John the Baptist is our great guide and intercessor in our observance of the Season of Advent, which is so strong in grace for our Christian living, even as he prepared the people for the Coming of Our Lord at Bethlehem and welcomed Him at His Coming. When we think of Saint John the Baptist, we think immediately of the words which he pronounced when Christ came to him to receive and transform the baptism which he was administering. When Christ came to John the Baptist at the Jordan where he was baptizing, Saint John declared:

“Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.”... “I saw the Spirit descend as a dove from heaven and remain on him. I myself did not know him; but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, ‘He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.’ And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God.”³

Each time, we participate in the Eucharistic Sacrifice, at the moment of Holy Communion, when the Sacred Host – the Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity of Christ – is presented to us, we hear the witness of Saint John the Baptist: “Behold the Lamb of God, behold him who takes away the sins of the world.”⁴

² Rom 15, 4-6. 13.

³ Jn 1, 29. 31-34.

⁴ *The Roman Missal*, English Translation according to the Third Typical Edition, 2011, “The Order of the Mass,” no. 132.

In today's Gospel, after confirming his identity for the disciples of Saint John the Baptist who had been imprisoned by Herod, Our Lord asked the people for whom they were looking in Saint John and confirmed that John was indeed His precursor, the Last of the Prophets. He said to the people:

“What did you go out into the wilderness to behold? ... To see a prophet?
Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is he of whom it is written,
‘Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who shall prepare you way
before you’.”⁵

Saint John the Baptist is our sure guide and intercessor in the preparation to welcome Our Lord ever more into our hearts. His insistence on the faithful living of God's commandments through prayer and penance for our sins disposes our hearts to an ever fuller communion with the Heart of Jesus.

Our hearts are easily distracted and discouraged in the work of prayer and penance by which they are prepared to rest in the Divine Heart which became a human heart under the Immaculate Heart of Mary. We are distracted and discouraged by our own struggles with the temptations to sin, especially by our struggles with habitual sin. We are also distracted and discouraged by all of the evil we see in the world around us: ignorance of Christ, indifference to Him, and open rebellion to His way of holiness of life. When we are distracted and discouraged, we must remember that God the Son's Heart, divine and human, beats unceasingly with love for us and pours forth without measure the sevenfold gift of the Holy Spirit into our hearts. Dom Prosper Guéranger, in his meditation for the Second Sunday of Advent reminds us:

And of the holy Spirit and His gifts, what shall we say? They rest and are poured out on the Messiah only to the end that they may flow from Him upon us; He needs them not; but we alone need wisdom and understanding, counsel and fortitude, knowledge and godliness, and fear of the Lord. Let us ask with instance for this divine Spirit, by whose operation Jesus was conceived and born in Mary's womb, and let us beg of Him to form Jesus within our hearts.⁶

⁵ Mt 11, 7. 9-10.

⁶ “Parlerons-nous de l'Esprit-Saint et de ses dons, qui ne se répandent sur le Messie qu'afin de descendre ensuite sur nous, qui seuls avons besoin de Sagesse et d'Intelligence, de Conseil et de Force, de Science, de Piété et de Crainte de Dieu ? Implorons avec instances ce divin Esprit par l'opération duquel Jésus a été conçu et formé au sein de

When we are distracted and discouraged in our preparation for the celebration of Christmas, in our steadfast effort to place our hearts, one with the Immaculate Heart of Mary, more completely into the glorious pierced Heart of Jesus, let us draw upon the sevenfold gift of the Holy Spirit dwelling in our hearts. Through prayer and penance, let us cooperate with the divine grace which is never lacking to us. God will never fail “to form Jesus within our hearts,” if only ask Him in prayer and dispose ourselves for His gift by penance.

Under the guidance and direction of Saint John the Baptist, let us now offer our hearts to Our Lord Jesus Christ, placing them completely into His glorious, pierced Heart through the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. One with Mary Immaculate, the Mother of God, Saint John the Baptist, the Precursor of Our Lord at His Coming, and Saint Juan Diego, faithful messenger of the Mother of God under her title of Our Lady of Guadalupe, let us give our hearts completely to the Sacred Heart of Jesus through His Eucharistic Sacrifice. Resting our hearts, beset with so much distraction and discouragement, in His Heart, we will be strengthened in prayer and penance, we will be purified of all that is keeping us from welcoming Our Lord more fully into our hearts. We will be filled with His pure and selfless love for our neighbor, for all our brothers and sisters, and especially for those who are in most need. As we lift up our hearts to the Heart of Jesus, we pray:

Stir up, O Lord, our hearts to prepare the way of thy only-begotten Son: that
by his coming we may be enabled to serve thee with pure minds.⁷

*Heart of Jesus, formed by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mary, have mercy on us!
Our Lady of Guadalupe, Mother of America and Star of the New Evangelization, pray for us!
Saint John the Baptist, pray for us!
Saint Juan Diego, pray for us!*

Raymond Leo Cardinal BURKE

Marie, et demandons-lui de le former aussi dans notre cœur”. Prosper Guéranger, *L’année liturgique*, L’Avent, 21^{ème} éd. (Tours: Maison Alfred Mame et Fils, 1926), pp. 162-163. English translation: GuérangerEng, p. 162.

⁷ “Excita, Domine, corda nostra ad praeparandas Unigeniti tui vias: ut per ejus adventum, purificatis mentibus servire mereamur.” Prosper Guéranger, *The Liturgical Year*, Advent, Vol. 1 (Great Falls, MT: St. Bonaventure Publications, 2000), p. 164.