

Commentary for the Second Sunday of Advent (B)

If We Want Change, We Need To Change



He didn't look like them. He didn't talk like them.

He was not part of the crowd that had always held power. Yet he talked about change. And the people listened, and followed.

John the Baptist dressed in camel's hair and had a leather belt. He didn't dress like the Scribes, Pharisees and Temple priests. He never was part of that crowd. But John the Baptist talked about change that was certainly coming. The thing is for the change to take place, it was the people who had to change. If there is going to be no more war, then people need to stop hating others. If there is going to be charity and care for all, then people needed to look inside their hearts and pull out the justice of God that resides there. If there is going to be change, then people needed to change.

That is the change we can believe in. "Prepare for the Lord," John the Baptist proclaims in the Gospel for this Second Sunday of Advent. Prepare for the Lord by preparing yourselves. And the people from throughout the Judean countryside and the inhabitants of Jerusalem went out to the Jordan River where

John was preaching. And they confessed their sins. And they were baptized. And the change had begun.

We all want our country and our world to be better. We all want a cure for cancer and AIDS and malnutrition and every ailment or condition that is killing people. We all want the poor to be cared for. We all want an end to violence both that which is carried out by terrorists and that which takes place in every

town and city throughout the world. We all want peace. But what are we doing about it? The heart of John the Baptist's message is that if we want change, if we really want the One who will reform the world and return mankind to God's original plan, then we need to change.

This is tough. It is just so much easier to sit back and expect the government to change, the world to change, other people to change. But if we really want change we can believe in, then we need to change.

The Gospel is calling us to look to ourselves. Perhaps someone has mistreated us. We were innocent, and that person attacked us. Maybe it was a parent who constantly belittled us. Maybe it was someone at work or at school who really enjoyed making our life difficult. Perhaps it was someone we barely knew, who took it upon himself or herself to berate us. How have we responded? Sadly, many times I have responded by matching nastiness with nastiness. Perhaps you have too. How can we expect there to be peace in the world, when we respond to hate with hate? If we want the world to change, we need to change.

Perhaps our economic position in life has been rather poor. We shop at discount stores and buy inferior products because we simply can't afford to buy brand name clothes, brand name food, and so forth. But do we hope that some day we will have so much that we will be able to squander our money? So many professional athletes have given horrible examples of greed. So many are making five million or more and spending ten million or more. Is this our idea of success? Are we looking to ourselves first? How can we expect there to be an end to world poverty when our basic attitude, our deep hope is to someday be able to be selfish? If we want the world to change, we need to change.

John the Baptist knew that he was striking a chord with people. He saw them responding to his preaching. The Gospel of Luke says that the crowds asked him, "What shall we do?" He said, "If you

have two cloaks, give one to someone who has none. Share your food with the hungry.” When the dregs of Jewish society, the tax collectors sincerely asked him, “What shall we do?” he told them to stop cheating people. Even soldiers asked John what they should do. He responded that they stop bullying people and acting unjustly. John wanted to make one thing clear, though: People should not be changing just because they were drawn to his words. He was merely preparing them for the One whose words would be those of the Word of God. “One mightier than me is coming after me.” “I am not worthy to even take off his shoes. What I do is earth bound, I am baptizing with water. What he will do is infinitely beyond the earth. He will baptize with the Holy Spirit.”

Our determination to reform ourselves, to change ourselves so that we can change the world is not merely based on humanitarian needs, but is based on the spiritual. We belong to Jesus Christ. We are His People. He has called us to make His Presence real throughout the world. For us, love is not merely the opposite of hate. Love is the Presence of Jesus Christ within us and among us. For us charity is not just the opposite of greed. Charity is the Lord working through us to care for others.

Every year we priests go on rants about how so much of our society is trying to destroy the original meaning of Christmas. We decry the use of the terms “Holiday Season or Winter Holidays, or Seasons Greetings.” And we should. We are saddened that a spiritual celebration has been transformed into a series of drinking parties. And we should be. But, perhaps, we should all be less concerned with the commercialization of Christmas and the debasement of Christmas from the birth of a poor child in a stable to the celebration of materialism, and be more concerned about what we are doing to Prepare the world for Jesus Christ. What John the Baptist is telling us is to look within, change our own attitudes, and then trust God to allow this change to have a part in the transformation the world.

Change we can believe in will only take place if we are the ones who change. That is what it means to Prepare for the Lord.

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