

December 4, 2022 – Second Sunday of Advent
Waiting for the Lord is to have an Authentic Conversion
Gospel of Matthew 3:1-12
Fr. Oliver

Many of us are already engrossed in the preparation for Christmas. A good number have sent out their Christmas cards and Christmas shopping is already in full swing. Others are engrossed on deciding what gifts to give while children are busy deciding what they want to get from their parents. Many of us have an excitement as we look forward to the Big Day.

The trouble, it seems, is that our modern society has commercialized Christmas so that we have mistaken the icings from the cake, the accidents from the substance. Let us always be aware that there is always the danger of losing the right perspective. Hence, we need to constantly remind ourselves to 'Keep Christ on Christmas.'

Waiting for the Lord to be reborn in our lives is the theme of today's readings: *Waiting*, an inevitable and even necessary aspect of human life, is not something that most of us relish. We *wait* in lines: in order to purchase groceries; to be served at popular restaurants; to be assisted in a bank; at stop signs and traffic signals; at amusement parks; to see a play or film. We must also *wait* for flowers to grow and bloom; for babies to be born; for wounds to heal; for bread to rise; for cheese to age; for children to mature; for friends to call; and for love to deepen. Statisticians have estimated that in a lifetime of 70 years, the average person spends at least 3 years *waiting!* — Today's readings invite us to *wait* for the rebirth of the Lord in our lives with repentant hearts and renewed lives.

The first reading describes how God will reform the lives of His Chosen People by sending the Messiah. Because of the bad example of the unfaithful successors of King David, the Chosen People were wavering in their loyalty to Yahweh. Hence, in the first reading, the Lord God, through His prophet, Isaiah, tries to dispel their fears and to stir up *hope* among His people with His promise of a new Davidic King (a son of Jesse), who will establish peace and a glorious Kingdom of justice on earth. In the second reading, Paul is praying for the reformation of the Jewish Christians of Rome and instructing them to draw endurance and encouragement from the Old Testament books. They are to live in harmony with Gentile Christians, accepting them as equals, brothers and sisters, while they wait together for the second coming of Jesus. In today's Gospel, John the Baptizer urges the Pharisees and Sadducees to give evidence that they mean to reform their lives so as to recognize and be ready to meet and accept the promised Messiah. He challenges them to repentance, conversion, and renewal. He tells the common people, who expect the Messiah to come soon, to act with justice and charity, letting their lives reflect the transformation that will occur when the Messiah enters their lives. In the same way, as we prepare to welcome Christ at Christmas, John advises us to "*prepare the way of the Lord.*"

While only two Gospels mention the nativity, all four Gospels introduce Jesus with an account of John the Baptist's ministry (Matthew 3:1-12; Mark 1:1-11; Luke 3:1-22; John 1:6-9). Matthew puts slightly greater emphasis on John's words than on his action of baptizing. He records a direct quote from John's preaching: "*Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is near.*" There had been no prophet in Israel for 400 hundred years. But the people had no hesitation in accepting John as a prophet because he was like a burning torch summoning men to righteousness, a signpost to point men to God, and he had the authority of a man of God. John's message was not soothing.

It cuts into the very hearts of men. John denounced evil wherever he found it. He accused Herod of living a loose moral life (14:4), addressed the Scribes and the Pharisees as "brood of vipers" and summoned people to righteousness. His message was "*Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven has come near*" (v. 2), words which Jesus later would use to begin his own preaching (4:17), and similar to those the disciples would proclaim (10:7). John justified his call to repentance by announcing that the Kingdom of Heaven was near and that the way to prepare for that day was to repent. Literally, the Greek word *for repentance* (*metánoia* in Greek), means, "to change one's mind and heart," a change of direction or a U-turn. Repentance involves turning around – facing in a new direction — with a change of heart and a new commitment. Repentance is a daily experience that renews our Baptism. "The repentant person comes before God saying, 'I can't do it myself, God. Kill me and give me new life. You buried me in Baptism. Bury me again today. Raise me to a new life.'" Repentance for us is not a one-time action but must take place daily, because preparing for the Lord is a daily task for us who are living our lives in flesh and time on this earth. We are all living in a very precarious time in this 21st century. At this time, I remember a watsup message that I recently received explaining about the unparallel differences of this 21st century: "where our phones are wireless, cars are keyless, cooking is fireless, foods are fatless, dresses are sleeveless, youths are jobless, tires are tubeless, heads are shameless, wives are fearless, children are mannerless, babies are fatherless, relations are meaningless, feelings are heartless, attitudes are careless: everything is becoming "less" but still our hopes are endless and in fact I am speechless".

Yes, my dear friends, it is in this context, John's answer as to how the Jews should prepare for the Messiah was that they should wait for the Lord with repentant hearts and reformed lives. We can start by praying from the heart. Let us remember that the Holy Mass is the most powerful of prayers because it transforms us into Eucharistic people, providing the living presence of Jesus in our hearts and his divine life in our souls. Conversion is through Jesus whom we encounter, mainly, through the Holy Scripture and the Sacraments. The Word and the Sacraments are the principal means God uses to give life to men's souls.

John the Baptist, the stern and uncompromising preacher, challenges our superficial attempts at change, demanding that we take a deeper look. Obeying the commandments is a good start, but we must also examine our relationships with others. We must mend ruptures and soothe frictions, face family responsibilities, work honestly, and treat our employers and employees justly. Start where you are, John says. Our domestic and social lives must be put in order. John's voice is sober and runs counter to the intoxicating voices around us today. He calls for rectitude and social consciousness. We must abandon our selfish thirst for consumption and, instead, be filled with the expectation of Jesus' coming. Therefore, following John's advice, let us celebrate the memory of this first advent, prepare for Jesus' new advent in our lives, and wait for his second advent at the end of the world.