

SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT

MK:1:1-8

Not too many years ago, newspapers carried the story of Al Johnson, a Kansas man who repented of his sins and chose Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior. What made his story so remarkable was the fact that, as a result of his newfound Faith in Christ, he confessed to a bank robbery he had participated in when he was nineteen years old. Because of the statute of limitations, Johnson could not be prosecuted for the offense. But because of his complete and total change of heart, he not only confessed his crime but voluntarily repaid his share of the stolen money! — That's repentance — metanoia — the radical change of heart demanded by John the Baptist in today's Gospel.

Today's readings remind us that the past, present, and future comings of Jesus into the world are the fulfillment of the saving plan of God. Today's Scripture readings deal with coming home — Babylonian exiles coming home, the shalom or perfect peace coming home, our going home with Jesus at his Second Coming, and Jesus, the Savior, "coming home" into our lives during Advent. All three readings focus on the absolute necessity of our readying ourselves by repentance and reparation for Christ's coming. In the first reading, Isaiah assures his people that the Lord will restore their homeland to them and care for them as a shepherd cares for the sheep. Today's Responsorial Psalm (Ps 85) also speaks of the return of shalom, and pardon to the people. The second reading gives an answer to those who scoff at the expectation of the Second Coming of Christ, explaining that God's way of reckoning time is different from ours and that God has His own reasons for delaying Christ's second coming. Peter assures us that Jesus is sure to come again although we do not know when. Hence, while we wait, we should be leading lives of holiness and godliness. Finally, the Gospel tells us that the restoration of the fallen world has already begun, starting with the arrival of John the Baptist, the messenger and forerunner of the Messiah. John speaks of one, more powerful than he — Jesus Christ — who will baptize us with the Holy Spirit. Each of us has received the gift of the Holy Spirit in Baptism, and now we live in the Spirit each day, waiting for the return of our Lord. Thus, we become John the Baptist's successors, preparing for Christ's return which will bring a new and perfect world.

We need to make use of Advent as a season of reflection and preparation. We are invited by the Church to prepare for Christmas through this time of reflection and personal renewal in preparation for the coming of Jesus into our lives. In the section of St. Peter's Second Letter which we read today, Peter reminds us, on the one hand of God's great desire to come into our lives and, on the other, of our need to be prepared for that event when it happens. We want and need God's help and comfort, but we are not always prepared to change our ways to enhance genuine conversion. For God to come to us, we also need to go to Him. We need to let every day become Christmas and the "Day of the Lord" for each one of us.

We need to accept Jesus instead of ignoring him during this Christmas season. It was their

stubborn pride and self-centeredness, which blinded the eyes of the Jews and kept them from recognizing Jesus as their long-awaited Messiah. The same stubborn pride, the same exaggerated sense of our dignity, blinds the intellects of many of us today who not only fail to accept Christ and his good tidings but also prevent others from accepting him. The mad rush for earthly possessions and pleasures, the casting-off of all the reasonable restraints and restrictions that are so necessary for the survival of human society, the rejection of all things spiritual in man's make-up, the general incitement of the animal instincts in man – all these are signs of the rejection of Christ. Let us accept Jesus as our personal Savior and Lord during this Christmas season and remain, or become, true Christians in our daily conduct. Let us use these days of preparation for Christmas to prepare ourselves for Christ's daily coming and Second Coming, remembering that the Second Coming will occur for each one of us on the day of our death, or the Day of the Lord, whichever comes first.

John's message challenges us to consider whether we lead others to Jesus, or whether our actions are motivated by a need for attention and affirmation. John's preaching reminds us also of our important task of announcing Christ to others through our lives at home, in the workplace, at school, and in the parish and local communities. When we show real love, kindness, mercy, and a spirit of forgiveness, we are announcing the truth that Christ is with us. Thus, our lives become a kind of Bible that others can read. John the Baptist invites us to turn this Advent season into a real spiritual homecoming by making the necessary preparations for the arrival of the Savior and his entrance into our lives.