

## St Pius & St Anthony Homily 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday Advent Year A1

What comes to mind for you when you think of John the Baptist? This week and next, we are going to hear about him, in our gospel reading. I think he is a great Advent Figure to pray over: he exhibits a personality perfectly suited to Advent, because he exemplifies what the purpose of the season: **God is Coming, so get ready!** He did just that as Jesus came the first time as a historical event over two thousand years ago (that child-God born in Bethlehem) but also now, as we wait and watch for His 2<sup>nd</sup> coming, what we call the END, or the Lord's return again. We get ready to celebrate God's coming into our world (the key to use here is that we are to **celebrate it** -not dread it, not fear it, not try to avoid it). In fact, God's coming again is awesome: that God loves us so much, that He would want to intervene and insert Himself into our human drama, into our world & lives, our history to redeem us. We are blessed with other great Advent figures too. We will hear about them in the coming days as we near Christmas, include John's own parents who prepared for John's own entrance into the world, and of course, Mary and Joseph who most personally and intimately prepared for Jesus' coming by feeling the actual changes in their own lives (Mary really feeling the change), but also Joseph as change was called for from their vocational plans. Whatever they had in mind planned for life, God dropped His design on them leading them to adapt/change for His greater plan.

So what does John represent or say to us? First his message is simple enough: **"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand"** (Matt 3:2). **Repent** what's that? – Change for the better, or to Convert—essentially, turn to God. Yes, confess our sin if it is clear to us: Maybe we know that we need to change something- 1)cut something harmful & sinful out of my life, 2)drop some wasteful habit using up my soul's energy away from God, or 3) eliminate something that is cutting into my commitments to family or my state in life. If we know already something that needs working on, then get to it and do it. But even if we feel that we are doing okay avoiding sin, John still has a message for us by saying, 'Repent' (he says we shouldn't be so sure-so smug about it-God may have more in mind for us). John's word of conversion still speaks to us, even if we think we are just fine in our devotional lives to God. In that case, 'Repent', means "Reflect upon God—Take stock of my life— if this moment is my last, is everything in order in my life? Am I performing my God given duty and call to the fullest? Am I maximizing the

position that God has given me?” John’s message about the Kingdom of God being at hand, means basically, using a sports metaphor, “This is the fourth quarter – Do I have any points on the board? When the final buzzer goes off, in this tournament game, will I advance in the bracket?”

This is where John’s ‘put-down’ to the Pharisees and Sadducees comes in? He sniffs out their insincerity immediately when they show up at the Jordan. Basically, he says, “You bunch of sneaky snakes”(okay, he actually says, “You brood of vipers”) But he means that their appearance is showy –to spy on & poison the water of his reform movement (turning people back to God). The Pharisees’ intent is to hijack this latest fashion of spirituality, and to take control of for their own purposes John’s growing religious movement. So, John challenges them, that if they genuinely want baptism, **they should show their commitment to change, by exhibiting some of it** – show me the money, or as John says, “Produce good fruit as evidence of your repentance” (Matt 3:8). Show to the world, that you are serious about God. That message applies to everyone. Are we showing our repentance? Are we working at it – at being ready? What acts of mercy, works of mercy are we showing as proof of our conversion?

So John calls us to ‘change’. Most often when we hear such calls for change, we never get around to it, I think because in our we overblow the change called for, almost shutting ourselves down before we even begin. We say, “It’s too big for me, too much is demanded, I’ve failed so many times before trying” But that is so self-serving (not even trying). John would say “Stop – give it a chance - grow the gain slowly” I think that is what John means when he puts down the Pharisees, saying, “God can raise up children to Abraham from these stones” (Matt 3:9). He puts the Pharisees in place calling them knots on a log-rocks on the ground, who think because they ‘claim heritage with Abraham that they are going to slide into heaven (like ‘I know a guy’ – as some kind of get around). But John, and Jesus later, says emphatically, “That doesn’t work”. But this saying also applies to all of us, helping us realize that with God, all things are possible. ‘God’s grace, can soften/overcome, even bring to life, our stuck, heavy, rock hard sinful resistance to Him. We can live and grown again (if we turn to Him). So we begin small, take up even a tiny resolve to add a new habit of grace, a new practice of prayer, give God a little more time each day (even as simple as just writing down every morning, three things I am thankful for today) - but do it, do

something every day- and the change for better will come. John tells us to 'produce good fruit as evidence of our repentance'. So we need to get to it, showing our seriousness and preparation for Jesus' return by specific actions reflected in our lives: actions others can see!

Again, our resistance to change is probably because we exaggerate it and think it is too much, too hard, or too big. But, John *doesn't say*, 'It is all on you to change the world'. No, he only says, "Produce fruit yourselves that you are serious about Jesus". I like the story told about the child who asked his dad to go outside and play pitch and catch with him. The father has just sat down to enjoy reading the afternoon paper (that dates the story as old, doesn't it?) The dad saw a big picture of the earth from outer space, so he said, "Son, we will go out to play, but first I want you to piece together this jigsaw puzzle I make for you." It was going to have a lot of differently shaded blue pieces to make it very hard to put together. So after the father tore the pieces and gave it to his son, he thought he would have a leisurely time to finish reading the paper. But after only about ten minutes, the child returned and said, "All done!" The dad was surprised and asked, "How did you finish it already-all those blue pieces?" His son answered, "It was easy, I had no idea sorting out all those blues, but when I flipped the pieces over, I saw the silhouette figure of a man, and thought that was something I know. So, I just focused on the person, piecing him together, and the earth appeared solid and back together too." That is an Advent message: John calls us to repent, to change, and get the earth ready to receive Her King as Jesus' coming back. Where do we start: we don't have to remake the world, we just have to start right here with the human person, adjusting/changing this life of mine- and everything else will fall into place. Become the change, show the fruit of my own conversion and the world will follow.