

2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Advent

December 7, 2025

St. Edward's Parish

Friends, this Sunday we enter the second week of Advent. Last week, we considered how Advent directs us not only to look back to Christ's first coming in Bethlehem but also to look forward to His Second Coming and be attentive to the ways He comes to us right now. On the Second and Third Sundays of Advent, the Gospel turns to John the Baptist. The whole purpose of John's life was to "prepare the way of the Lord", so he is our guide during Advent if we wish to prepare our hearts and lives to receive Jesus.

On this Second Sunday of Advent, we hear the first words of John the Baptist recorded in the Gospel of Matthew: "Repent for the kingdom of heaven has come near." John announces that the key to preparing for the coming of Jesus is *repentance*. By repentance we simply mean a turning away from all that is not of God (i.e. sin), and a turning back towards Him. As Advent arrives, we often think about many ways of preparing for Christmas: shopping, cleaning, decorating, etc... but repentance is not on the top of most lists. We can see here what is so wonderful about celebrating Advent in the heart of the Catholic Church. The Church guides us through the right interior dispositions and the meaning of Advent so we can truly come closer to Christ. A key interior disposition for this time of Advent is repentance in light of Christ's coming. The Gospel recounts that: "The people of Jerusalem and all Judea were going out to him, and all the region along the Jorda, and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins."

There are numerous ways that we can live repentance: we may ask for forgiveness from others, we may grieve over our sins, we may turn to God in prayer and perhaps take up some form of fasting and acts of charity. But above all these, the sacrament of Confession, is the great treasure left by Christ as the ordinary means to be reconciled to God and to the Church when we have sinned. It is a tragedy of our times that this treasure has fallen by the wayside. This is one

key area in the life of the Church that calls for renewal. If we want to see renewal in the Church, it will come with a revival of the sacrament of Confession. When I look at a parish, I generally don't evaluate the vibrancy of a parish primarily by how many attend Mass, or how many are involved in ministries, or how big the collection is; generally, I look to the confessional. If there are people sincerely going to Confession and priests being generous in hearing Confessions, it is often a good sign that there is true life. If you visit great places of spiritual renewal in the Church today, for example the Marian shrines in Lourdes or Medjugorje, you will notice a special emphasis on the sacrament of Confession. The great saints of renewal in the Church such as St. Padre Pio or St. John Vianny were known for drawing thousands of people back to Confession.

There may be many reasons why Confession has fallen by the wayside: a general loss of the sense of sin in our modern times, a desire to focus only on things that make us feel happy (Confession requires sorrow and admitting our faults), clergy scandals that have wounded our trust, lack of good faith formation, and the inappropriate use of General Absolution (should only be for true emergencies) etc.... Yet, I am confident God is calling us to pierce through these obstacles and renew the call of St. John the Baptist: "Repent".

This Advent, let us allow the words of John the Baptist to move our hearts to repentance. As we begin this new liturgical year with the season of Advent, I encourage everyone to make a special effort to return to the sacrament of Confession. In fact, I would like to propose this is as a challenge for the year. You can go to any Catholic priest you wish, anywhere you wish, but I encourage everyone to go to Confession this year. For my part, go regularly myself, and I am happy to be available for Confessions. If we need more Confession times, I will gladly do so. Confession is a gift that enables us to remove all spiritual obstacles and receive the Lord Jesus into our souls. This truly is the heart of Advent.