

16 December 2018, 9.15 a.m. | 3rd Sunday of Advent Year C
Zephaniah 3:14-18 | Psalm: Isaiah 12:2-3, 4-6 | Philippians 4:4-7 |
Luke 3:10-18

REPENTANCE – ANOTHER BAPTISM

Introduction

As we begin this Eucharist, today's liturgy invites us to experience joy – joy in the midst of our lives, our struggles and difficulties. This joy that the Lord wants to give us is not entertainment or superficial happiness but a true inner peace and joy that come from conversion and repentance. As we celebrate this Eucharist on our way to Christmas, let us pray that this may mark our lives with an experience of a true inner joy that comes from the Lord. Let us now call to mind our sins. Let us call to mind all that pulls us down and blocks our experience of true joy.

Homily

My dear sisters and brothers, unlike most of us, unlike the Greeks that lived during the time of Jesus, and unlike the Arabs, the people of Palestine were of a very practical nature. So, when they came to John to be baptised, their first question immediately after their baptism of repentance was, 'What must we do?' They were not asking about the theology of baptism, the meaning of baptism, the philosophy of baptism, but they asked about the practical implications of the baptism of repentance that John had given them. John responds promptly, and his response too is down to earth, absolutely practical, so that there was no room for doubt about what baptism entails. His suggestions are concrete. He says to them, 'If you have two coats, give one of them to somebody who does not have one. If you have food on your table, share it with someone who is hungry'.

Others also came for baptism, such as the tax collectors. In such cases too, John is very specific. He tells them what is pertinent and relevant to them: Do not overtax the people. Tax collectors in those days would buy their rights from the Romans, and they had a right to extort money from the people. So John tells them to stop extorting money – it is not just. Be satisfied with your wages. Do not try to inflate your wages by squeezing the poor. Then there were others, like soldiers, and John also gave them very specific instructions about what they should do after receiving baptism.

My dear sisters and brothers, almost all of us, with the exception of a few, received baptism when we were children, and so it was something that we were not conscious about. Maybe as infants, when our parents and godparents carried us for baptism, we woke up when the priest poured water on our heads. That was just an awakening from a sleep, which was as good as a child continuing to sleep during the sacrament. And so, most of us have been baptised mechanically, and we have not realised the practical implications of our baptism.

The Church does not permit us to receive baptism more than once. Even if a person is baptised validly in another Christian denomination and wishes to be admitted into the Roman Catholic Church, they make a profession of faith but cannot receive the sacrament of baptism again. However, the Church offers us a 'second baptism'. What is this 'second baptism'? Theologically, it is the sacrament of reconciliation, of confession, of penance. That is a new baptism that we can receive over and over again when we experience our sinfulness. Over the next three days, the church in Mulund will offer the sacrament of confession from 5 p.m. to 8.30 p.m.

However, when we go to confession, we could once again make it a mechanical process. We can come mechanically because everyone goes to church for confession before Christmas. It's a nice feeling, but this is not a second baptism. We received our first baptism almost unconsciously, and the Church gives us a chance to receive a second baptism – a second chance of conversion. John preached a baptism of repentance. Can we make our confession, not just mechanically, but in a true, meaningful sense?

How can we do that? The first thing is: stop and pray. When you come into the church, don't rush into the queue for confession. Stop and pray. There will be little leaflets kept around the church that can help us prepare for the sacrament of reconciliation. Let us sit in front of God and honestly examine ourselves – examine the very hidden recesses of our hearts, the concealed motives for the wrong that we have done, for the way we have excused our wrong, the way we have condoned our wrong by saying it was a mistake or somebody else's fault, and have not taken responsibility for ourselves. If we don't accept that responsibility, then it is no act of repentance. It is mechanical, a ritual, a mere ceremony. The 'second baptism' offered by the Church begins with this honest reflection of our lives.

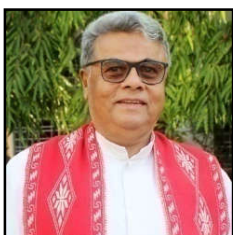
What are the gods in our lives? We have made our little gods, our comforts, our own way of thinking, acting and living. We don't want anyone to touch these areas of our lives. God, at this time, may want to touch us and ask us to open up that area that we never examined seriously. Re-look at ourselves, not in the mirror of God's punishment but in the mirror of God's love. Then we will be able to see even the deepest, most hidden sins of our lives and can honestly bring them to the confessional.

We need to examine sometimes the patterns in our lives because there is often a pattern through which we fall into a particular sin. Let's suppose there is an addiction. Addiction usually is a type of sin that follows a certain pattern. We have a low feeling; we blame everybody else around us; we want an escape, and we rationalise our behaviour: 'What's wrong if I have a little drink? I've seen other people drink too', and we excuse ourselves. The Lord invites us to examine ourselves and to examine the patterns of our sinfulness and wrongdoing. We must always know that we need the power of God's spirit. I've seen this happening in my own experience of wanting to truly experience God's hand that can change lives. God can touch us, God can convert us, and we can be new people in a new baptism that we can experience in the sacrament of reconciliation.

And so, dear sisters and brothers, as we come on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday for confession, spend some quiet time in our beautiful chapel, examine yourselves in the presence of a forgiving God, and let us have the courage not to excuse but to admit what is wrong in our lives – admit it to ourselves, admit it to God, admit it in confession, and we will experience the true inner joy of God's love, of God's forgiveness, of God's peace, Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

Let us pray to our Heavenly Father that each one of us may experience a true and deep conversion so that we may also experience the joy of Jesus' coming. We pray, Our Father...



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