

“Disciples of the Word”

The Second Sunday of Advent - Presided by: Bishop Ariel Cornelio P. Santos

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December 4, 2016: The Second Sunday of Advent

Isaiah 11: 1 – 10/ Psalm 72: 1 – 8/ Romans 15: 4 - 7; 13/ Matthew 3: 1 - 12

Bishop Ariel Cornelio P. Santos

We find a prominent figure in Advent by the name of John the Baptist. He was called to preach the gospel to the Jews, God’s very people, and his message to them was *to repent*. He did not get unbelievers born again. He got the people of God to repent. Imagine the people of God being told to repent. John was harder on the leaders, and yet, just like Jesus, after rebuking them, he would tell them the right thing to do. He said, “Therefore, bring forth fruit in keeping with repentance.” Jesus called the Pharisees and the Sadducees vipers and whitewashed tombs and yet after that, He would say, “Clean the inside first then the outside will follow.” He did not end with His rebuke or His harshness. Jesus and John the Baptist both ended with an exhortation to get right with God.

John further said, “Do not suppose that you can say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham for our father,’ that is, ‘Do not suppose that you can invoke that you are a Jew, that you belong to the people of God, the household of Israel, that you are baptized, or that you can face your successors to the Apostles.’” It is not about your Church going or your membership. It is not about form or about your long spiritual resume, but it is all about bearing fruit.

In Luke 13, they were witnessing the execution of the criminals under Caesar and Jesus said to His disciples, “Do you think these criminals are the worst sinners than the rest of the residents of Jerusalem? I tell you, no! I tell you that unless you Church members, tithers, burnt offerers, and observers of the Law *repent*, you will all likewise perish.” Who is called to repent? It is all of us who are called to repent. What does perish mean? Jesus just repeated what God said to Adam in creation, “Of all the fruit of the tree, you may eat, but not this one fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil because the day you eat of it, you shall surely perish.” God gave man life, eternal life, but then man disobeyed. He sinned and that life ceased from being very good, and death entered and life cease to be eternal.

When Adam sinned, he missed the mark – the divine nature that God put in us so that we should be walking by and we should be living by. If we missed that mark, going below that standard, then, that is sinning. God created us made us very good and partakers of the divine nature. If we don't live by that nature, then, we are sinning, missing the mark, and walking below standard. Repentance is not ceasing in living below that standard, below

that which God set for us as our standard. Bear fruit in keeping with that repentance by manifesting the truth of your creation, what God intended for us to be – to act and to live.

In Luke 3, in a parallel story, the people asked John the Baptist what they should do. He told them, “He who has food, let him share with those who do not have. He who has two tunics, let him share them.” I asked you of this “Are you a blessed people? What kind of blessing did you receive from God? Is it just enough for you?” It is more than enough! Do you know how I know that? It is because He who gave you your blessing, His name is “More than Enough.” When He gives, it is always more than enough – overflowing abundance. This is always God’s intention.

We qualify to that group which John the Baptist was referring to – those who have been blessed to have more than what is enough for them and overflowing. We have been called to share the blessings that God has given to us. The primary reason why there is more than enough for us is so that we can exercise the divine nature of sharing. If we do not have more than enough, we are not equipped to exercise that divine nature. If we have more than two tunics, we are to share. In fact, many of us have more than five or six. Statistics say that the average person uses only 30% of the clothes he has in his closet, so this means that 70% is meant to be shared.

For the past few days, God has been waking me up and speaking to me one hour earlier than the time I usually get up. One day, He gave me a specific prayer to tell you right now, “Pause for a few moments and count our blessings and realize how much more we have than we need. Let God speak to you as to how you can share it.”

We give because there are needs. We are to be sensitive. There are people whom the Church ministers to who are in need of medical requirements. There are those we bless because they are socially underprivileged. Right in the midst of us, there is a need for the construction of the Church building. We give not primarily because of those needs. Those are just avenues that God provided. We give because we have been called to walk in the manner worthy of our divine nature. In order to achieve that, God equips us with a surplus of blessings. If He gives us a command and He doesn’t equip us, how will we follow that command? Before He sends us, He equips us.

Don’t lose your focus. The main reason we give is so that we can please God by walking in the manner of the calling we receive from Him, that is, to be ever blessing like He is. God equips us with gifts, talents and blessings so that we can use them to bless and to meet needs. This is the order. Bear fruit in keeping with our repentance.

Our giving does not depend on the need or worthiness or unworthiness of the recipient or the beneficiary. I am not saying don't give in wisdom, but our giving is primarily based on the divine nature that we have in us. If we question this, ask yourselves this: were we worthy of God's blessings? Sometimes we think, "Before I bless, is the person worthy?" Nobody is worthy – not even you or me. God, nonetheless, realizes that has nothing to do with the divine nature we have in us. God is a giver and this is why He gives.

The tax collectors asked John, "What do we do?" John replied, "Collect no more than what you have to. Don't take money by force or accuse anyone falsely, and be content with your wages." You may ask "What shall we do?" Love your classmate who is gay. Love your neighbor who is unlovable. Accept those who don't agree with you.

In a misunderstanding or argument, many times, both parties have a point. The only people who don't see that both have a point are the opposing parties. They think they only have a point. As a personal lesson that I have learned, having a point is not the point. It is acceptance, unity, forgiveness and harmony. Accept one another. Repent from lack of unity. We repent from division because people of God walk in a manner worthy of their calling. The standard is not division; the standard is, "Behold and how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity."

The gospel that John the Baptist proclaimed is repentance. Repent from living below the standard that God intended for us human beings to live. The Kingdom is here and it is coming and we need to be fit for the Kingdom. We prepare for the Kingdom come, and this Kingdom is a perfect Kingdom. Right now, we practice and we rehearse. We better shape up. Creation cries for us, people of God! Shape up for the Kingdom because the Kingdom is goodness. We need the revelation of the sons of God. Valleys exalt! Mountains and hills are brought low so that we have harmony.

Accepting one another and refraining from disunity gives glory to God. The coming Kingdom is the Prince of Peace. We better shape up and do not be belligerent, war freaks, but creatures of peace because this coming Kingdom is increasingly peaceful. There is no end to the increase of His government or of peace. We are looking to meet the Prince of Peace. His kingdom is all about restoration, which is leading up to that Kingdom with the increase of peace and goodness and everything that is appropriate for the Kingdom.

Repentance is preparation by participation according to the standard of the Kingdom. John said to repent because the Kingdom is at hand, the Kingdom is here and it is coming. Repent so that we can be fit for the Kingdom. In Philippians 3, St. Paul in TLB said, "*I press on so that I will be what Christ saved me for and wants me to be.*" Christ already saved us. Christ already attained for us restoration to the goodness of our creation. All that we

need to do with all our heart is to press on to walk in the manner worthy of what already attained for our calling.

In the story of the prodigal son, he was already accepted by his father. He wasn't required to clean himself first. His father kissed him and put an expensive robe on him. His father allowed him to sit on expensive clean furniture, even if he smelled like a pig. If we were the prodigal son, in response, we wouldn't stay in this condition. We would clean ourselves up. We could clean our act. We would shape up and walk in a manner worthy of the kingdom of our God.

Jesus said that the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than John, and this brings us joy. This behooves us to shape up and say that our standard should be higher than John. St. Paul said, "Let us keep living by that standard to which we have attained and to which Jesus attained on our behalf. We have been placed there. Royalty is born into royalty and what they do is to act royally.

The movie "Saving Private Ryan" is a story of one Private Ryan, whose two brothers already died in the war. He has a widow for a mother. It was the World War II and the President of the United States said that it is not fair for the widow to lose his third and last son because the family would not have posterity. To preserve the posterity, Private Ryan should be rescued and taken home. There was this scene where the Captain was shot and he was dying. He grabbed Private Ryan by the collar and said in his ear, "Earn it! Earn it!" It is like saying, "We saved you. We gave our lives for you. Be worthy of this salvation. Don't waste your life by throwing away the life that we saved for you. If you are just going to be a drug addict, a junkie, or someone who is living immorally, then, you are wasting our lives. We died for you; live according to the standard that was provided for you."

Christ died for us not so that we would go to hell, but so we could restore God's creation. He created us with dignity. He created us with His divine nature and His image is imprinted on our faces. If we waste that by living with pigs and eating their food, then, we waste the costly salvation that was provided by Christ for us. Earn it! Live by that standard!

This is how we prepare for the coming of the Lord. This is the message of the gospel. This is repentance. This is Advent and this is the way it is in the kingdom of our God.