

From Repentance to Change

By: Fr. Mike Bayard S.J.

John the Baptist makes his appearance today, "preaching in the desert of Judea and saying 'Repent, for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand!'" (Mt 3:1-2) His is a voice of one crying out to all humanity: Repent, prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths. Two more weeks and we'll have Christmas, the coming of our Lord. What better way to prepare for his coming than repentance, sorrow for our wrongdoing and cleansing our soul so that the Lord may joyfully be born again in our hearts.

Repentance is the realization of one's wrongdoing, an acknowledgment of one's guilt. It often involves that terrible feeling of remorse after hurting and failing somebody. It is that sorrowful and compelling sentiment that moves us to right the wrong thing, to make peace and to turn away from situations that frustrate our good conscience. Repentance is an activity that describes something you can do for great personal growth and change. In more simple terms, repentance is about changing your mind about anything that has kept you from living out your right moral values. It is changing for the better.

Repentance is the feeling, the thinking. Change is the fruit, the substance and the action. Deep level change is not going to happen just because you know something in your head of have felt it in your emotions. It requires taking steps to train your heart to espouse that which is right and good, to love God and care for the world around us. How can we change, how can we alter our non-growth promoting attitude?

-Stay positive. Calm your fears. You can change! You can stay away! You can do it! Flood your mind with encouraging views and notions.

-Get a little help from your friends and loved one. Let those close to you know your resolve. Tell them what you are doing and enlist their support to help you change. They'll certainly be happy over your personal project and will offer you ideas. The more you feel the support and concern of your loved ones, the more likely you'd feel responsible and thus be successful.

-Think as the person that you want to be. A loving person? A compassionate person, a peaceful person? Then psyche yourself in thinking you are just that. Your action will slowly follow your thinking.

-Build up your moral strength. We keep doing what we

don't want to do because of the false benefits we think we gain from our behavior. But these "benefits" hurt us greatly, they greatly weaken us. Get a hold of your life and a grip on personal control. Don't yield your moral values to mindless behavior. Recognize the havoc. Change and build up your spiritual and moral resistance.

-Immerse yourself in your resolve. Rad books or articles that will help you understand your past predicament and make you aware of what to expect. Read about what will help you plan your strategies and adopt a new and positive attitude. Listen to music, tapes or lectures that will inspire you and encourage you to change.

-Seek a role model or a wise elder. Find someone who already has the attitude and the character that you seek. Follow their lead and learn from their example. It will be a big help to interview or seek their advice. Their experience and good words can reduce the time and frustration involved, as well as provide you with many new ideas to help you grow.

-Veer away from your old ways. Avoid situations, environments and persons that you know have caused you sadness and degradation. How can change occur if you keep on doing the same old stuff in the same old way? Do things differently now. Walk on the right terrain and act according to your core beliefs. Seek or create an environment that reflects the values and behavior you wish to have. Craft the physical space that makes you eager to change.

-Be patient. Recognize that most changes occur slowly, over an extended period of time. Don't get discouraged. Make room for mistakes. If you don't get immediate results, don't be surprised. The worst thing you can do is quit. Keep working. The change will come.

-Team up with God. God, the source of repentance and forgiveness is here. Be aware of god's presence and allow His abundant grace to be poured out on you. You certainly will need a lot of it. He desires nothing other than to have you draw near to him. Awareness of God's loving presence soothes the hurt alone the way. It steadies your longing and fills you with deep faith With you and God working together, nothing can go wrong. It is a dream team, a winning team!

Adopted from 'Sunday Examiner'

READINGS OF THE WEEK

Isaiah 11:1-10

Romans 15:4-9

Matthew 3:1-12

December 8, 2013

靈 修 生 活

繩 子 的 後 面

蔡 惠 民 神 父

有一個教友到教堂領修和聖事。在修和室他向神父認罪，承認自己偷了一根繩子。神父有點不解地問：「就是為了這微小而不值錢的東西，你覺得需要與天主修和嗎？」教友很不好意思地說：「那是一根很粗的繩子。」經過一段時間的掙扎，這位教友最後說出：「在那根繩子後面還綁了一頭牛。」

聽了這故事，相信很多教友有所共鳴，甚至發出會心的微笑。的確，在修和聖事中，向神父一針見血表明自己的軟弱和罪過，實在是需要很大的勇氣。所以，時至今日，仍有教友感到尷尬，不習慣面對面修和的方式，如果遇著認識自己的神父，則更難於啟齒。究竟克服這種羞慚，不好意思的勇氣是從何而來的呢？

在瑪竇福音中，洗者約翰宣告救恩即將來臨：「在那時刻，祂將要以聖神和火洗你們。」一方面我們可以從上文理中明白，火是代表審判：「祂的簸箕已在祂手中，祂要揚淨自己的禾場，將祂的麥粒收入倉內，至於糠秕，卻要用不滅的火焚燒。」另一方面，我們可以從厄則克耳先知(卅六 25-28) 和岳厄爾先知(三 1-5)的預言瞭解，聖神是代表新的身份和使命：「那時，我要在你們身上灑清水，潔淨你們，淨化你們的不潔和偶像…… 我要將我的神賜給你們，使你們遵守我的誡命，且一一實行。你們要居住在我賜給你們祖先的地方，你們要作我的百姓。」所以，約翰所宣告的救恩，是包括審判和重生兩個幅度的。

在兩個幅度中，約翰的確是較強調救恩來臨時審判的一面，影響所及，修和聖事的舉行，亦好像人到天主面前，接受天主的審判，因而疏忽了聖神更新的幅度。不過，若果我們細心研讀，約翰洗者以嚴厲的說話強調天主審判的同時，他並沒有一一細數以色列人的罪過。原來，天主的審判，目的並不是叫人無地自容，而是讓他們在跌倒中知恩惜恩，並藉這份恩寵去報恩，在萬民中宣示天主在自己身上所成就的大事。以色列的被選，並不是因為他們比其他民族更聖潔，而是他們無條件被寬恕的經驗，要成為普世民族得救一個典範。所以，洗者約翰雖然嚴厲責斥，但他沒有忘記，審判的另一面是讓人經驗天主的憐憫，並願意宣述天主的光榮。

知恩惜恩報恩亦貫連了另外兩篇讀經的內容 形成本主日目的中心思想。依撒意亞先知預言救恩實現時，葉瑟的樹幹將生出一個嫩枝，這個嫩枝就是新的以色列，上主的神將住在他內，並使他成為萬民的旗幟。籍着這面旗幟，外邦必將尋求祂。同樣，面對著一個充滿紛爭和內部矛盾的團體，保祿在羅馬人書中，強調人與人之間不應彼此判斷。因為若不是基督首先無條件接納我們，無人能在天主面前可以自誇。基督徒的蒙召，就是始於一份知恩惜恩。因此，在這個將臨期中，讀經邀請我們再一次明認自己的軟弱，在團體中彼此擔待，並歌頌天主的聖名，好使外邦人也因天主的憐憫而光榮天主。

摘自「公教報」

本 週 讀 經

二 零 一 三 年 十 二 月 八 日

依 11:1-10； 羅 15:4-9； 瑪 3:1-12