

Second Sunday of Advent – Year C

(Baruch 5: 1-9; Philippians 1: 4-6; 8-11; Lk 3:1-6)
(Excerpts from Pope Benedict XVI - Angelus – 2009 & 2012)
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Brothers and sisters, on this Second Sunday of Advent, the Liturgy presents to us the Gospel passage in which Saint Luke, prepares the scene, so to speak, on which Jesus is about to enter and begin his public ministry (cf. Lk 3: 1-6). The Evangelist focuses on John the Baptist, who was the Precursor of the Messiah, and with great precision outlines the space-time (...) of his preaching.

Two things attract our attention. The first is the abundance of references to all the political and religious authorities of Palestine in A.D. 27-28. The Evangelist wanted to warn those who read or hear about it that the Gospel is not a legend but the account of a true story, that Jesus of Nazareth is a historical figure who fits into that precise context. The second noteworthy element is that after this ample historical introduction, the subject becomes “the word of God”, which came to John the Baptist.

December 7th will be the liturgical Memorial of Saint Ambrose, the great Bishop of Milan. I take from him a comment on this Gospel text: “The Son of God before gathering the Church together, acts first of all in his humble servant. Thus, Saint Luke rightly says that the word of God came to John the son of Zechariah in the wilderness, because the Church was not born from people, but from the Word” (*Espos. on St Luke's Gospel* 2, 67).

Here then is the meaning: the Word of God is the subject that moves history forward, inspires the prophets, prepares the way for the Lord and calls the Church. Jesus himself is the divine Word who was made flesh in Mary’s virginal womb: in him God was fully revealed, he spoke to us, and gave us his all, offering to us the precious gifts of his truth and mercy. Saint Ambrose then continues in his commentary: “The Word came down so that the earth, which was previously a desert, might produce its fruit for us” (*ibid.*).

In the Season of Advent, and even at the beginning of Lent, the figure of John the Baptist prepares Jesus’ ministry. Saint Luke presents the connection between the two figures and their respective missions at an earlier stage.... Even in conception and birth, Jesus and John are linked together” (*Jesus of Nazareth: The Infancy Narratives*, p. 14). This setting helps us to realize that John, as the son of Zechariah and Elizabeth, both from priestly families, is not only the last of the prophets but also represents the entire priesthood of the Old Covenant and therefore prepares people for the spiritual worship of the New Covenant inaugurated by Jesus (cf. *ibid.*, pp. 18-19).

John the Baptist (...) plays an important role but always in terms of Christ. Saint Augustine comments: “John is the voice, but the Lord is the Word who was in the beginning (cf. Jn 1:1). John is the voice that lasts for a time; from the beginning Christ is the Word who lives for ever. Take away the word (...) and what is the voice? Where there is no understanding, there is only a meaningless sound. The voice without the word strikes the ear but does not build up the heart” (*In ev. Johannis tractatus* 293, 3: pl 38, 1328).

Today it is up to us to listen to that voice so as to make room for Jesus, the Word who saves us, and to welcome him into our hearts. Let us prepare ourselves in this Season of Advent to see, with the eyes of faith in the humble Grotto of Bethlehem, God’s salvation (cf. Lk 3:6). In the consumer society in which we are tempted to seek joy in things, the Baptist teaches us to live in an essential manner, so that Christmas may be lived not only as an external feast, but as the feast of the Son of God who came to bring men and women peace, life and true joy.

Brothers and sisters, we will celebrate December 8th, The Immaculate Conception. The most beautiful flower that blossomed from the word of God is the Virgin Mary. She is the first-fruit of the Church, God’s garden on this earth. However, while Mary is Immaculate, (...) the Church is continually in need of purification, because sin lays snares for all her members. In the Church a conflict is always present between the desert and the garden, between sin that renders the ground dry and grace that waters it so that it may produce abundant fruits of holiness.

Therefore, let us pray to the Mother of the Lord that she may help us, in this Season of Advent, to “rectify” our lives, letting ourselves be guided by the word of God. Through her motherly intercession, may Mary help us to be ready to receive, in our heart and in our whole life, the Emmanuel, God-with-us.