



# WEEKLY GOSPEL REFLECTION



2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Advent, Cycle A



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*"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near." Matthew 3:1*

The wild and wooly image of John the Baptizer always makes its appearance on the Second Sunday of Advent. It is such a powerful image that it has given birth to a stereotype: the robed, sandal-clad, long-haired and bearded, gaunt prophet who carries a placard, *"Repent! For the Kingdom of Heaven is Near!"* The readings this week are a call to repentance. In the first reading we hear a savior will bring change to our world. In the second reading we are told to be more welcoming to one another. In the Gospel, the passionate words of John the Baptist stir within us a call to repentance.

John introduces us to the concept of "baptism." His baptism is a call to a lifelong conversion rather than simple physical purification. We are called to a sincere resolution to reform our life. To approach this perceptive prophet and his ritual cleansing with any but the purest of intentions would be insincere. Those who did so received his scathing wrath. In our time, Saint Padre Pio was just as prophetic and perceptive. A man once went to confess to Padre Pio. When the man finished the accusation of his sins Padre Pio said: *"Do you have anything else to confess?"* and he said, *"No Father!"* He repeated the question: *"Do you have anything else to confess?"* *"No Father!"* For a third time Padre Pio asked him: *"Do you have anything else to confess?"* At this third negative answer with the voice of John the Baptizer, Padre Pio howled: *"Go away! Go away! Because you are not reformed of your sins!"*

This Second Week of Advent should be a time of recollection for us, calling us to a soulful desire for repentance. In St Paul's word, this is called *metanoia*. *Metanoia* not only calls us through the power of the Holy Spirit to affect actual change within us. This must always accompany our desire to root out sin and beg Jesus Christ for a healing of the wound causing that sin. We must seek, and we shall find. Knock and the door will be open into the Kingdom of Heaven, which is always near. Through the mercy of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, the core wound so deeply afflicting us is healed, and a lifetime change ensues. Once healed, we not only turn away from sin, but also lift our spirit to the divine radiance of Christ and His Mystical Church, to the profound glory of His Eucharistic Banquet, where we *"Lift up our hands to His holy place and bless the Lord!" (Ps 134)*

*"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son,  
so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life." John 3:16*

This week, as we light the Second Advent candle, called the Candle of Bethlehem, let us reflect on its purpose, that John the Baptist, like the Evening Star of Bethlehem, will lead the way to a personal encounter with Jesus Christ and his heart of mercy.

**A Reading from the Holy Gospel according to Matthew**

In those days John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness of Judea, proclaiming,  
*“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.”*

This is the one of whom the prophet Isaiah spoke when he said,

*“The voice of one crying out in the wilderness:  
‘Prepare the way of the Lord,  
make his paths straight.’”*

Now John wore clothing of camel’s hair with a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. Then the people of Jerusalem and all Judea were going out to him, and all the region along the Jordan, and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.

But when he saw many Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruit worthy of repentance. Do not presume to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our ancestor’; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. Even now the ax is lying at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

“I baptize you with water for repentance, but one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and will gather his wheat into the granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.”

***The Gospel of the Lord***