

[Spirituality](#)



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December 14, 2017

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We're very much aware, I'm sure, that the season of Advent is a time of waiting. It's a time when we're preparing, in a special way, for the coming of Jesus. We do that looking for Jesus to come in three different ways. First of all, we're preparing for Christmas, of course, when we celebrate the anniversary of the birth of Jesus over 2,000 years ago when the Son of God entered into human history, became part of the human family, a brother and sister to every one of us, obviously something worth celebrating.

Second Sunday of Advent

Isaiah 40:1-5, 9-11

Psalms 85

2 Peter 3:8-14

Mark 1:1-8

[Full text of the readings](#)

Every year, year after year, we prepare to celebrate this coming of Jesus into our history, into our family. But we also prepare for the coming of Jesus at the end of time. That's what St. Peter's letter was about. The first disciples had thought Jesus was coming back almost immediately to establish the fullness of the kingdom of God and they would be taken into it. But year after year, decade after decade went past and we're still looking forward to that return of Jesus when he brings the fullness of God's reign into our human history.

Then the third coming (and I think this is especially what the Scriptures are about today), is when Jesus enters into the life of each one of us at any time, many times, over and over again, if only we're alert to that coming. In the first letter of John, John reminds us that God first loved us. That's how we happen to exist; God loved us into existence. God never stops loving us. That's what our first lesson is about today, how God loves those chosen people at a time when they've been living in exile, suffering, being violated, and brutalized. Finally, they're freed and they're back.

Isaiah says these beautiful, consoling words, and the people experience the presence of God: "Be comforted my people, be strengthened. Speak to the heart of

Jerusalem, proclaim to her that the time of slavery is at an end. ... A voice cries in the wilderness, 'Prepare the way for God.' " Isaiah proclaims very comforting words at the end as they experience the presence of God like a shepherd: "God tends the flock. God gathers the lambs in his arms. God carries them in God's bosom, gently leading those that are with young."

The people experienced a very deep closeness with God, a time of consolation and comfort. That's the same thing that can happen to us. We can experience God's presence within the depths of our own spirit, God offering comfort, God always waiting to be merciful to us; as Isaiah says in another place, God being with us — Immanuel. This is a coming of God that can happen to every one of us every day whenever we turn to God and try to be aware of God's presence.

But that takes, as St. Mark reminds us at the beginning of the Gospel, an alertness and an effort to separate ourselves somewhat from all the distractions that are present all around us in our everyday life. That's why Mark says John preached to the people: "After me comes one who is more powerful than I am. ... I have baptized you with water, but this one will baptize you in the Holy Spirit. ... Let the people hear the voice calling in the desert: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, level his paths.' "

Change some of the ways in which we live our daily lives. Make God's way to us open. Clear the distractions and constant commercialism that we get so involved with during this time when we should be looking for the coming of Jesus. In fact, besides trying to be more penitential in our lives, which is what John is asking of us — to strip away the distractions, I think it might be helpful if we remember yesterday's feast, the Feast of the Immaculate Conception of Mary, a feast where, in a certain sense, we try to put Mary way up on a pedestal because she was, from the first instant of her existence, without sin.

How could we match that? We can't. So Mary is beyond our reach, in a sense. We can look up to her, but we can't imitate her in that regard. But there is a way, in which from yesterday's Gospel, we can imitate Mary because yesterday's Gospel was the angel coming and telling Mary, when she was trying to listen to God, that she was to be the mother of God. Mary was confused. How could that happen? How could that be that I would be the mother of God? The angel told her the Holy Spirit would come upon her. The one to be born of her will be Son of God. Mary then says, "Be it done to me according to God's word."

She listens and she responds and says "yes" to God. Rather than thinking of her as way above us because she listened to God, Mary is someone we can imitate. Mary, in fact, according to the words of Jesus himself was a true disciple of Jesus. A disciple of Jesus is someone who learns from Jesus, who listens to Jesus. There was that incident in the life of Jesus where a huge crowd was following him and one of the people in the crowd cried out, "Blessed is the womb that bore you and the breasts that nursed you!" Do you remember what Jesus said? "No, blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it!"

There was no one who heard that word of God more deeply and kept it more faithfully than Mary, the mother of Jesus. So during this time of Advent, we remember how John the Baptist calls us to penance, to strip down some of the excess in our lives so that we can simplify and be more alert to God being present to us. But then Mary shows us how to be a true disciple of Jesus, one who listens every day, listens deeply for God to speak within my heart. God does speak to us, but we have to take the time to listen, to be ready as Mary said, "Let it be done to me according to God's will."

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If we spend time now during these next three weeks of Advent trying to do that penance that John the Baptist calls us to, and try to listen each day to God's word and the Scriptures and our daily prayer, then we will be getting ready for the coming of Jesus to celebrate with great joy, Christmas, to await with confidence the return of Jesus at the end of time, but especially, we will hear Jesus speaking to us in the depths of our heart, coming to us each day to change us, to help us, to always be ready to say to God, "Your will be done, not mine."

[Homily given Dec. 10 at St. Clare of Montefalco, Grosse Point Park, Michigan. The transcripts of Bishop Thomas Gumbleton's homilies are [posted weekly](#) to NCRonline.org. [Sign up here](#) to receive an email alert when the latest homily is posted.]