

**Homily for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Advent – Cycle C  
Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception  
Springfield, Illinois  
December 5, 2021**

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My dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

On the Second and Third Sundays of Advent, the Gospels focus on St. John the Baptist. The Gospel of St. Luke (3:1-6), which we just heard, situates John the Baptist in a historical context. St. John the Baptist is not some fictional character, but truly lived in the course of history as a contemporary of Jesus, whose birthday we are preparing to celebrate twenty days from today.

St. Luke tells us that John the Baptist “went throughout the whole region of the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.” Luke then quotes from the prophet Isaiah to indicate that the mission of John the Baptist was to “prepare the way of the Lord.” John’s baptism of repentance must be seen, then, as preparatory for the baptism that Christ would bring to His disciples. Indeed, Christ began his public ministry by calling people to repentance and conversion: *Repent, and believe in the gospel* (Mk 1:15; cf. Mt 4:17).

While both John the Baptist and Jesus call people to repentance and baptize with water, Jesus goes beyond that and sends the Holy Spirit to those who are baptized in the name of the Holy Trinity: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. The gift of the Holy Spirit gives us the power to live as Christians, to proclaim the Gospel to others, and to lead others to God.

When a person is baptized, it is not necessary to go to Confession to confess one's sins committed before baptism, since baptism forgives all previous sins. Despite receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit to strengthen us to live as Christians, baptism does not take away our free will, which means that we must still fight the temptation to sin, and sometimes in our weakness we will give in to sin. Since a person can be baptized only once, Jesus gave us another sacrament, the Sacrament of Reconciliation, so that we can repent of our sins committed after baptism and be forgiven by confessing our sins and receiving sacramental absolution. Thus, one of the best ways to prepare spiritually for the celebration of Christmas is to go to sacramental confession. Our society spends so much time, money, and energy on the material preparations for Christmas. We should not neglect to give at least as much attention to our spiritual preparation as well.

Just before Christmas in 1980, Pope John Paul II was with over 2,000 children in a parish in Rome. He began teaching them by asking, "How are you preparing for Christmas?"

"By praying," the children shouted back.

"Very good, by praying," the Pope said, "but also by going to Confession. You must go to Confession so that you can go to Communion later. Will you do that?"

In an even louder voice, those thousands of children shouted back, "We will!"

The Holy Father tells them, "Yes, you ought to go." Then John Paul lowered his voice and whispered, "The Pope will also go to Confession so as to receive the child Jesus worthily."<sup>1</sup>

Yes, Popes, bishops and priests go to confession, too. Pope Francis makes no secret of his going to confession. Last month at our meeting of the Catholic Bishops of the United States, we began with a morning of Eucharistic adoration and prayer, during which the Sacrament of Reconciliation was offered. It was inspiring to see long lines of bishops going to confession, myself included. No one should think that he or she is without

sin and does not need to receive the graces of the Sacraments of Penance and the Holy Eucharist in order to grow closer in our relationship with Christ.

In order to make a good confession, one must make a sincere and honest examination of conscience, reviewing the Ten Commandments, the Beatitudes, and the seven deadly sins of pride, envy, anger, avarice, gluttony, lust, and sloth. Then, one must not hesitate to confess these sins to the priest in confession. Doing so will relieve a great burden from one's conscience, and will make our celebration of Christmas truly a season of peace and joy.

In his sermon on the six aspects of Advent, St. Bernard said, "God reveals to you, as He did to the children, what is hidden from the learned and wise: the true ways of salvation. Meditate on them with the greatest attention. Steep yourself in the meaning of these Advent days. And above all, pay heed to Him who is approaching."<sup>2</sup>

May God give us this grace. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> See Francis Fernandez, *In Conversation with God*, vol. 1 (London-New York: Scepter, 2012) 23.

<sup>2</sup> St. Bernard, Sermon on the six aspects of Advent, 1; quoted in Francis Fernandez, *In Conversation with God*, vol. 1 (London-New York: Scepter, 2012) 24.