

Second Sunday of Advent

Homily: Fr. Shijo George

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“Repent, make the paths straight!” this is the declaration of the forerunner of Jesus. Only by repentance can one make our path straight; that is, navigating life based on the precepts of Yahweh, and receiving the Messiah who baptizes with the Holy Spirit, the Fire. John the Baptist was calling everyone to prepare themselves to receive the Saviour.

The word *repentance* is closely related to a total change in life. It originated from the Latin word *paenitere* meaning, ‘to regret’ or ‘be sorry.’ From a biblical perspective, the Greek word for repentance is the one associated with today’s Gospel passage: the root words in Greek being *metanoia* (noun) and *metanoēō* (verb).

These Greek words are composed of two parts:

Meta: meaning "after" or "change".

Noeō: meaning "to perceive, to think, or to exercise the mind".

Thus, *metanoia* literally means a "change of mind" or a fundamental reorientation of one's outlook and purpose, which then leads to a change in behaviour and life. When people came to John the Baptist, he said: "There is no salvation without repentance." By living immoral lives, being indifferent and disobedient to God, manipulating the commandments of God, and living in spiritual darkness, the people were imprisoned by their own sins. John the Baptist was summoning them to change their minds, “Metanoia;” to liberate them from self-imprisonment.

You may have heard the fable, *The Monkey and the Trap*. This story has many versions. Here is one version: In a certain place, hunters had a unique method for capturing monkeys using a hollowed-out gourd or jar fixed to the ground, with



tempting food placed inside. The mouth of the gourd or jar was barely large enough for a monkey's hand to fit through to grab the morsel. When a monkey takes the bait and grasps the food with a clenched fist, its hand becomes too big for the mouth of the trap. Yes, of course the monkey could easily get unstuck by releasing the food to free its hand. However, the iron-grip of attachment, greed, and desire for this food keeps the hand clenched, and the monkey is trapped by nothing more than its own unwillingness to let go!

In the same way, the lack of the longing for repentance and the absence of the desire to turn to God keep our lives and ourselves in self-imprisonment and in slavery; hindering us from having the Divine Presence. Parallel to the story, we may be stuck in our own little world where there is no place for God; lost in our anxieties, our fears of life, our sins, resentment, anger, envy, hatred, and so on. Like the monkey in the story, the monkey is not trapped by the hunter but by its own greed and unwillingness to release what it is holding on to.

Saint Augustine viewed sin as a disordered desire in human beings. In today's Gospel passage, sin may be compared to paths that are crooked and wicked; symbolizing a life of disorder, depravity, immorality, unrighteousness, and actions contrary to God's Will. John's call to the crowd to make crooked paths straight is a call to avoid the wicked and disordered paths of life, and to turn back to Yahweh.

In Psalm 51:17, we are told that: "The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise." As we prepare to celebrate Christmas, let us take the invitation of John the Baptist into our hearts: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

The best Christmas gift we can give to Jesus is our beautiful hearts, for Him to come and live in.