

### Third Sunday of Advent - C

I really like this passage from Luke's Gospel. Even though John the Baptist has been tasked with nothing less than announcing that the entire sweep of human history is about to pivot, when people ask what they should do about that, he gets very concrete.

John knows his territory. In each answer he provides a response which fits the questioners to a T. He recognizes their big temptations, names them, and let's the people know in no uncertain terms that preparing for the Lord's coming will entail doing something about them.

Even though John recognizes that he is subordinate to the one coming, and will have to learn from him, he is quite confident in proclaiming the necessary repentance required.

Morality is already available and the right can already be pursued. What the Lord will bring will build on that and go beyond it—the gift of the Holy Spirit.

This Holy Spirit that Jesus brings will inspire and direct people's lives and provide them with the commitment to carry out John's agenda of reform.

The Holy Spirit is the fire that both purifies every moral effort and provides the passion to persevere. The Holy Spirit is the fire that burns without burning out, the fire of the bush that energized Moses in his relentless efforts to free the people from slavery.

In the period of Advent preparation we do well to remember that the gift of the Holy Spirit continues to be offered, and opening ourselves to that gift by living uprightly is still the order of the day. The Holy Spirit is one gift we no longer have to wait for.

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Living uprightly is always done in the concrete circumstances of our lives. It's not something that exists just in our heads.

And so, we also do well to ask, "What should we do?" and allow the inspiration we receive to get very specific. Sometimes the thing we should most "do" is the one we avoid most diligently.

If we can't make progress in confronting our major temptation directly, there is another way.

Take a value like compassion, or forgiveness or reconciliation or peace or justice.

Now, take ten minutes a day in the morning and meditate on it. If you can't find ten minutes, take five.

Suppose we choose "compassion." Clear your mind of other thoughts and distractions. If they continue to intrude, just notice them and let them go. Return to compassion.

You might want to have a phrase to repeat silently and mindfully. A compassionate phrase that include everyone would be a phrase like, "Everyone wants to be happy and doesn't want to suffer."

As you slowly and silently repeat this phrase pictures of people you know may enter your mind. Simply use their name in the next phrase, "Joan wants to be happy and doesn't want to suffer. . . Frank wants to be happy and doesn't want to suffer." Every so often say, "I want to be happy and don't want to suffer."

When you have done this for ten minutes, get on with the day.

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Now for the really important part. At the end of the day, take some time to review the day in the light of the value you've chosen. No doubt you will notice some things that could have been done differently if you had remembered your value.

If so, redo the situation. Get on the phone, or e-mail and redo it. Don't let embarrassment stop you. Just do it. You may feel awkward at first, but you'll get used to it.

This is repenting. Repentance is not what bad people have to do. It's what people do who live from these core values like compassion, or reconciliation, or peace.

Most of us don't get it right the first time. We only notice what we could have done by looking in the rearview mirror.

How we get better is by acting on a more compassionate way when we see it. Eventually, we will notice it while we are in the middle of things and not after the fact.

That's evidence of the Holy Spirit active in our lives.

The process is never over. Repenting is something we will take with us all the way to the end. If we can make friends with that fact, things will go more easily, and we truly will be more open, more welcoming to the coming of the Lord.