

CONNECT! SUNDAY REFLECTION

2nd Sunday of Advent | For Sunday, December 4, 2022

Repentance and Preparation

Written by Br. John-Marmion Villa

Isaiah 11:1-10

Romans 15:4-9

Matthew 3:1-12



"I had gone a-begging from door to door in a village path, when thy golden chariot appeared in the distance like a gorgeous dream, and I wondered who was this King of all Kings! My hopes rose high and me-thought my evil days were at an end, and I stood waiting for alms to be given unasked and for wealth scattered on all sides in the dust. The chariot stopped where I stood. Thy glance fell on me and thou camest down with a smile. I felt that the luck of my life had come at last! Then, of a sudden, thou didst hold out thy right hand and say, "What hast thou to give to me?" Ah, what a kingly jest it was to open thy palm to a beggar to beg! I was confused, and stood undecided, and then from my wallet I slowly took out the least little grain of corn and gave to thee. But how great my surprise when at the day's end, I emptied my bag on the floor to find the least little gram of gold among the poor heap. I bitterly wept and wished that I had the heart to give thee my all."

— Rabindranath Tagore

[Tagore's](#) poem about a beggar might seem "nice" at first glance, the story of an unlikely exchange with a traveling king and a village beggar, which left the latter in tears at his home. But this story can help us understand today's Gospel during Advent.

The story of John the Baptist is familiar to all of us: the cousin of Jesus, dressed rather haggardly, preaching and baptizing before the Messiah. But we might have glossed over one simple line in today's text which might be likened to the proverbial record-scratch at a poignant moment, "Produce

good fruit as evidence of your repentance" (v. 8). How, during the merriment of the 'most wonderful time of the year,' do we do this?

The word "repentance" is rendered μετάνοια (metanoia) in Greek and means "a change of mind." Many of us might not realize that the liturgical season of Advent is also a penitential season. In our monastic community, we liken Advent to Lent, but with some sugar sprinkled on top!! It is certainly difficult to sense a penitential liturgical season amidst the rampant consumerism during the season. Precisely for this reason do the Church's penitential seasons prepare us for a solemn celebration of our faith. Advent prepares us for Christmas, just like Lent prepares us for Easter. The preparations involve repentance of some kind.

The prophet's words that stung the hearts of his listeners should also sting our hearts today. What is the good fruit that can evidence our repentance — a sign of our effort making preparations — during Advent so that we can experience a deeper immersion into the mystery of Jesus' incarnation that we will celebrate on December 25 and throughout the Christmas liturgical season?

We know that the real merriment of Christmas is not in receiving gifts, but in giving them, and watching our loved ones delight in our present. And yes, we know about the ultimate gift that Jesus gives to us in becoming human ... hence, the reason for the season ... he who is the only gateway for us to become who we really are meant to be. So, if Jesus himself is his gift to us — and we do indeed delight in that gift of himself — what gift will we give to Jesus in return this Christmas? And will it delight him?

Would it be a mere "little grain of corn"— the meager response of miserly beggar — to a divine request for alms, who, even in his poverty, thought it generous to give from the insignificance of his pocket rather than from wealth of his heart?

We know that nine months before Jesus' birth, the Blessed Mother gave her *fiat* in response to the angel's invitation, a gift of total surrender to the divine will. We also read that a few days after Jesus' birth, three wise men and their entourage come from the East, having traveled many miles for quite some time, bearing gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. All of these are costly gifts, indeed. Perhaps, our experience of preparations (i.e., metanoia, or repentance) this Advent could produce a good fruit that will indeed delight the Baby Jesus. I don't think Baby Jesus wants some gift that can be bought online or from a store, but rather, a comfortable space in the manger of your heart where he can rest his head this season. What interior preparations will you undertake — as costly as they may be — to prepare a suitable place for the Christ Child to lay his sweet head?

— Br. John-Marmion Villa

Prayer

God,

Thank You for uniquely creating me to serve You.

I want to use the gifts You've given me to bless You and Your people.

I want to be a faithful manager of all that You entrust to me.

So please show me how to use my talents to serve others and glorify Your name.

In Jesus' name. Amen.