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2nd Sunday Advent, Cycle A
Spps: Nezperce: Dec 05, 2010
Is 11: 1-10; Rom 15: 4-9; Mt 3: 1-12

In the Gospel we hear that John the Baptist appeared in the desert of Judea, saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!" About 7 centuries earlier before that time, the prophet Isaiah had spoken of John the Baptist when he said:
"A voice of one crying out in the desert,
Prepare the way of the Lord,
make straight his paths."

In the 2000 years of known religious history *before* Christ,
and now 2000 years *after* the time of Christ on earth,
there has been a cry from the desert.
2000 years ago it was a cry
from the *deserts of Palestine*.
Today, and from all places on earth,
we can imagine it as a cry
from the *desert of sin*.
Different places, different times,
but the same cry---
the cry of John the Baptist,
a cry for **repentance**.

Advent is a time of *anticipation* of Christ's coming---
the first *and* second time.
It is also a time of *preparation* for this coming.
Part of preparation is, of course, repentance---
repentance that is the sorrow
of the soul for sins committed---
hatred of those sins---
with a resolution to turn the other direction.

This sounds very melodious,
but let's not miss a crucial component here---
that is---to take repentance from *theory* to *actuality*.
Making a move to repentance,
as John the Baptist bids us to do,
requires an act of our own will.
And there is something we can do physically
to help us move through a process of repentance.
That is--- *to place ourselves on our knees*.
The mere physical positioning of our bodies
can lead our hearts and souls
in the right direction.

When I present instruction on the Mass,
I often include mention of the physical postures

we assume during this liturgy---
postures that are related to
how we are praying at any given moment.
We stand--we sit--we kneel.
When we are on our knees, in particular,
the movement of our body is obviously restricted.
Kneeling is a gesture of restriction,
but also a gesture of subservience and reverence.
[*I'm only talking, here,*
about kneeling in relationship to God].

When we take a posture of subservience,
and devote that posture
to expressing the truth of our human position
in relationship to God,
we are using our God-given gifts
of body and spirit
to give God what is due.
This one posture, kneeling,
can direct the body and the soul to God.

When we kneel as a posture for repentance---
we assume a position that aids us to focus
on our need for repentance---
and consideration of what
we specifically need to repent *for*.
This is *not* to insist on kneeling
for those who have bad knees,
or those for whom it is difficult.
This is just to say that kneeling
can help us focus on God,
and is at the same time,
a posture of reverence.

My own paternal family came
from what is now Northern Ireland.
You know how surnames often come
from something identified with the family.
We must have been very devout people.
It must have been said of us:
"they are a very "kneely" group of people."
[*I just thought I would throw that in!*]

From the time of the fall in the Garden of Eden,
there has always been a need for repentance,
and to take repentance
from the "theory" stage to the "active" stage.
It is easy to hear of the need for repentance,
only to go about our business as usual.
It is more difficult to *give* ourselves
to the actual *process* of repentance.
That is, to look at our actions---
to look within our soul,

and repent in order to keep ourselves "right with God"--- *Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and "with each other."*

By its very nature,
repentance and reconciliation
acknowledge the grace, mercy,
and forgiveness of God,
To prepare for, and receive
the Sacrament of Reconciliation,
we as much as say,
 "Christ, what you have accomplished
 on the Cross
 is sufficient for all I have done,
 and I **do** believe that in great love,
 you take these burdens from me,
 and welcome me back into the fold.
 Reconciliation cleanses me
 and returns me to my baptismal state---
 clean of soul,
 right with God,
 right with my neighbors.

God has chosen
to **delegate** the power to forgive sins
to the Church of His Son Christ,
who continues His mission in the world.
The Gospel of John 20: 21-23
is a pivotal Scripture passage here:
[The Risen Christ] appears to his disciples:
". . . *Peace be with you.*
As the Father has sent me,
so I send you.
And when he had said this,
he breathed on them and said to them,
'Receive the holy Spirit.

Why not just confess directly to God?
Since it is God who has been offended,
God can present the conditions of forgiveness.
Should we really insist that God forgive us
on our own terms.
St. Paul says in 2Cor5: 17-20:
". . . *God. . . has reconciled us to himself
through Christ
and given us the ministry of reconciliation,
namely, God was reconciling the world
to himself in Christ,
not counting their trespasses against them
and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.*
So we are ambassadors for Christ,
as if God were appealing through us.
We implore you on behalf of Christ,
be reconciled to God."
[ambassador = an authorized representative].

To confess to a priest
who has been consecrated
to act in the person of Christ,
is to put **flesh** to forgiveness.

So, to kneel down in preparation for repentance,
helps us mentally offer ourselves
in humility before God---
to contemplate our failings---
and seek to be in "right relationship" again with God,
and "right again" with our neighbors.