

SUNDAY OF THE SECOND WEEK OF ADVENT - B

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In last weekend's homily, we focused on our theme for this advent season – take the time to make the time to prepare for God's advent among us each and every day of our lives. Might we use that theme to focus in on today's celebration of this second Sunday?

The story is told that once upon a time, there were two brothers. One was an outstanding citizen; the other was a convict. The one who was a convict killed a man, was convicted of the crime, and later sentenced to life in prison. His brother, who was well respected, went to his friend, the governor, and pleaded for a pardon for his brother. Since the governor respected the older brother, he issued a pardon, and gave it to his friend.

Later, the brother went to visit his sibling in prison. He asked him, "What would you do if you were to escape or get released?" His brother replied from his cell, "First, I would kill the judge. Then, I would murder the chief witness against me." Upon hearing this, his brother was disheartened. He ended the conversation, walked out of the prison with the pardon in his pocket, and gave it back to the governor. His brother had no change of heart!

As we prepare for the advent of the Lord among us, we need to ask ourselves how do we need to prepare for his coming. In other words, what do we need to take the time to make the time for. Do we need to take the time to mend relationships in our lives? Do we need to take the time to get to know the Lord better by praying more? Might today's Scripture readings be challenging us to do the same thing that we heard in that story – to take the time to make the time to change our hearts and REPENT so that we might adequately prepare for the Lord's coming among us this Advent season?

In our first reading from the book of the prophet Isaiah, we hear the prophet tell Israel about the necessity for repentance in their lives that calls for some serious road construction – including all of the inconvenience that it entails. Isaiah is not telling us about minor repairs, like filling in potholes or repairing curbs. He tells us that we need to take the time for some serious reconfiguration of the entire landscape in our lives. Listen to his imagery – we need to fill in valleys and level the mountains. We need to smooth the rugged land and rough country. Isaiah tells his community of their need of repentance and serious transformation in their lives.

The author of Second Peter echoes this call to repentance. He picks up on the theme of last Sunday by telling us that there is a new world on the horizon – a new heaven and a new earth – one in which righteousness dwells, one in which justice and peace kiss. In order for us to prepare for that day that will come unexpectedly, we need to take the time to make the time to repent so that when the Lord comes, we will be ready to welcome him.

We hear the same message from John the Baptist in the Gospel today – "Take the time to repent, for you never know when the kingdom of heaven is at hand." John's ministry must have been pretty effective since they flocked to listen to him and to be baptized. Jews were children of Abraham by birth, and baptism was reserved for those who wanted to convert to Judaism. Yet, we see Jews come to John for baptism. Why did John make such an impact? He practiced what he preached and the

people of Israel heard an authentic message from God in him. The people of Israel always knew that if they kept God's law, one day God would come. John's challenge to take the time to repent was nothing new. He simply spoke with authority and challenged them turn inwardly and take the time to ask forgiveness for their sinfulness.

Where do you need to take the time for repentance in your life? As we wait for the coming of the savior – a day that will come unexpectedly – are you like the people of Isaiah's time? Do you need to take the time for some total reconstruction? Or do you feel compelled like the folks in the Gospel to simply take the time to ask the Lord for forgiveness? Our Lord's coming is right around the corner and he offers us his forgiveness if only we take the time to accept his pardon. This advent, how are you going to take the time to change your heart?