

Homily for the 2nd Sunday of Advent

You may remember that a year and a half ago Pope Francis promulgated his encyclical, *Laudato Si* (“*On Care for our Common Home*”), which addresses issues on how we are shaping the future of our planet. Many people characterized this document as one about environmental stewardship and ecology, but it is actually so much more. For example, in *Laudato Si* Pope Francis makes a distinction between two basic approaches to life – on the one hand, a contemplative-prophetic approach to life, and on the other, a possessive-consumeristic-dominating approach to life. In layman’s terms, a mindful, reflective, people-oriented life, versus a stuff-oriented, entertainment-focused tournament pretending to be life.

He writes, “Christian spirituality proposes an alternative understanding of the quality of life, and encourages a prophetic and contemplative lifestyle, one capable of deep enjoyment free of the obsession with consumption. We need to take up an ancient lesson found...in the Bible. It is the conviction that “less is more”. A constant flood of new consumer goods can baffle the heart and prevent us from cherishing each thing and each moment. To be serenely present to each reality, however small it may be, opens us to much greater horizons of understanding and personal fulfilment. Christian spirituality proposes a growth marked by moderation and the capacity to be happy with little. It is a return to that simplicity which allows us to stop and appreciate the small things, to be grateful for the opportunities which life affords us, to be spiritually detached from what we possess, and not to succumb to sadness for what we lack. This implies avoiding the dynamic of dominion and the mere accumulation of pleasures.”

Basically the two choices are: a Pharisees and Sadducees – “look at me”, “look what I got” – type of life; or, a John the Baptist – “I could care less if I’m wearing camel’s hair and eating locusts and wild honey, “look at Jesus” – type of life.

How about another analogy to compare the two approaches to life? On the one hand, the shopping season that begins way before Halloween, and reaches a high point with the greedy indulgence of Black Friday – this is “the Holidays” the secular world talks about; and, on the other hand, the gentler pace of life people pine for when stores are actually closed and loved ones can spend time – actual time – in relationship with one another, as we focus on the real reason for the season – this is the Christmas that we are in danger of losing.

My friends, the additional busyness of this time of year can so easily come to dominate our waking hours. These demands and desires *do* require our attention, but they are not the whole story. Advent calls us to look beyond the immediate concerns toward our eternal destiny, toward the reason we even celebrate Christmas in the first place.

In light of what Pope Francis speaks of in his encyclical, I would like to offer to you the following challenge. We are busy thinking about gift giving and various celebrations this time of year. This, in and of itself, can be a good thing, as we think about giving of ourselves, and giving to others – as we focus on the gift of family and friends, and the gift of our Catholic faith. But, let’s not forget whose birthday we are celebrating in a few weeks. It’s nice to give gifts to one another, but what are we giving to the “Birthday Boy”? What gift are you giving to Jesus this Christmas?

I can tell you what's at the very tippy top of Jesus' wish list – you are. You. That's what Jesus wants more than anything else this coming Christmas season, and the whole year through. He wants your heart. He wants your mind. He wants you to come to Him and talk to Him about any decisions you have to make – big or small. He wants you to tell Him about your day, whether bad or good. He wants you to talk to Him throughout the day, and then listen to Him. He wants to have a relationship with you. After all, isn't that the whole reason why God became man – Emmanuel, "God with us" – so that we could have an actual, personal relationship with Him?

But, before we can really say, "I love you" on Christmas to the Prince of Peace who loves us so much, we first need to tell Him, "I'm sorry for my sins, Lord – please forgive me." And for that, we have the beautiful sacrament of Reconciliation. In fact, on December 20 – that's right, December 2-0 – we'll have our Advent penance service, with about 10 priests here that evening to hear your confessions. You can find a priest you know or one you'll maybe never see again – the choice is yours.

If we spend so much time tidying up our homes for visitors and finding amazing gifts during this beautiful season, shouldn't we all the more spend time preparing our hearts and readying the gift Jesus wants the most? God bless you.