

Homily for the 2nd Sunday of Advent

“Seven-year-old Bobby was starring for the first time ever in his school’s Christmas play; he had the roll of the innkeeper. And as he told his mother weeks before the show, all he has to do was to tell Mary and Joseph that there’s no room at the inn for them. And so, in the days leading up to his debut, he kept practicing religiously – “There’s no room at this inn for you. There’s no room at this inn for you.”

Well, the big day finally arrived a week before Christmas. The curtain went up, and the show began. Everything was going so smoothly. Mary and Joseph were searching frantically looking for a place to stay, but nowhere could be found. As Bobby’s big moment was approaching, he watched Mary and Joseph as they struggled walking across the stage toward his inn. They looked so tired. And with an exhausted look on her face, Mary looked deeply into Bobby’s eyes as Joseph asked: “Is there any room at your inn for us?” Staring at Mary, Bobby took a deep breath and said his line: “No, there’s no room at this inn for you.” Saddened, Joseph turned away, putting his arm around Mary’s shoulders. And slowly they walked away.

But Bobby, suddenly swept up in the story, started to whimper. And after a few seconds, he ran up after Mary and Joseph, startling the audience. “Yes! There is room for you. Please come back. Stay with me”, Bobby blubbered, giving them both a big hug. Spontaneously the audience stood up and applauded. It wasn’t the ending everyone expected, but it certainly was one all seemed to want.”

Brave little Bobby! But, what he did is exactly what God the Father hoped for when he sent his son to be born on that very first Christmas. The Father wanted Jesus to be accepted, embraced, and loved exactly the way Bobby did when he heard the reality of his own words – “there’s no room for you” – and then repented of them. “No, Jesus. There IS room for you.” In fact, God desires all people to receive His son so that He can write a different sort of ending for our lives, just like Bobby did in the play. You see, through Jesus, God became one of us to rescue all people, from Adam and Eve down to us, from the exile caused by sin, and to welcome us back home to the Father. Because of Jesus, the Messiah, we are reconciled back to His Father after our disobedience, our sin. In other words, as Bobby changed the language that night in the play, so has God for human history. And all we need to do is repent of our sins and turn to Jesus.

In the Gospel passage that we heard today, John the Baptist, was preparing the way for the Messiah, calling everyone to “Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths!” And how were they to do this? By acknowledging their sins and repenting of them.

Today, Advent calls us to prepare for both our celebration of our Savior's birth and for His return in glory at the end of time. And how? Well, how about by repentance?! In fact, we remember the whole reason Jesus took flesh and was born was to save us from our sins. And so, repenting of our sins in the Sacrament of Reconciliation is precisely the way to receive Christ's saving sacrifice anew.

As our first reading proclaims to us today: The Lord desires "that all should come to repentance." Now, there are lots of reasons why people don't come to Confession nowadays. Some say they can confess their sins privately to God. Others just feel so embarrassed because of their sins that they won't talk about them. And still others say that they don't feel guilty – it's not like they killed anyone! While all of these excuses have valid aspects, they're missing an important truth. We human beings are body, mind, and spirit. And therefore, redemption must include all of these as well. And this is precisely why Jesus took on human flesh – to become one of us. Not just to forgive our sins in some spiritual kind of way. But, to redeem us entirely – body, mind, and spirit.

Similarly, it's in Reconciliation that Jesus' forgiveness comes to us wholly and completely – person to person, in the presence of the priest representing Jesus, the Good Shepherd; receiving the psychological balm of hearing those sweet words of forgiveness pronounced over us; and experiencing the true removal of the burden of guilt from the soul as sin is absolved.

My friends, there is true grace given us in the sacrament of penance. And it comes to us through our personal encounter with Jesus, who applies His sacrifice as the healing for our sins. I have to say that I love reconciliation. I love experiencing God's forgiveness myself, and I love seeing other people set free. So, if I could give you one piece of advice – please don't wait, because as our Scripture readings tells us today, the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night; and we do not know when we will go to God and stand before the judgment seat of Christ. So, please come to Confession at our parish penance service on December 19th, or come at the usual confession times as listed in the bulletin, or go to one of the other local parish penance services. And allow God to re-write the story for your life. God bless you.