

## **Bishop Bradley's Homily for the Second Sunday of Advent**

December 6, 2015 11:30 a.m. Mass St. Augustine Cathedral

This Advent Season is the next-to-the-shortest Liturgical Season of the whole Church Year (the shortest being the Christmas/Epiphany Season), but it's one of the most beautiful and hope-filled of all the seasons as well. Advent is a time when the Church keeps drawing our attention away from what is, here and now, to ponder and find hope in what is still to come.

That's what all of Sacred Scripture basically does----it keeps reminding us that we are "pilgrims" on a "journey of faith" who are passing through this world, with eternal life with God in Heaven as the goal of our final destination.

The Old Testament, especially the prophets, including the prophet Baruch whom we heard from in today's First Reading, continually helped the people to look forward to "the Day of the Lord"----the coming of the Messiah.

Of course that event has historically taken place with the birth of Jesus which we are preparing ourselves to joyfully celebrate just two and half weeks from now on Christmas. But we also know that Jesus' entire life and ministry was focused on winning salvation for all of humanity through His suffering, death and resurrection----and so the entire New Testament keeps us focused on the fact that we are also preparing ourselves for the Final Coming of Christ at the end of all time (or at the end of our lives, whichever comes first), when, we pray, we will enter into our Heavenly inheritance thanks to what Jesus' Act of Salvation has won for us.

Each of us works hard to make our lives here and now as happy and as peaceful as we can make it for ourselves and for our families. But during this Season of Advent, we are reminded that we must work equally hard to be sure that what still awaits us---our eternal salvation---is safeguarded by the ways we choose to live our lives here and now according to God's ways.

On Wednesday of this past week---the very first week of Advent---we were very harshly and cruelly reminded that we are far from living in a perfect world when we heard the news of yet another terroristic attack took place in San Bernadino, Calif. Fourteen innocent people were killed, almost two dozen more people were seriously injured, and an entire city and nation have been traumatized. These senseless acts of violence, which have political and distorted religious motivations, are most definitely caused by the spirit of evil. This season of Advent is also our

reminder that evil never has the final word; the spirit of evil will always be overcome and ultimately defeated by the Holy Spirit of God. In the meantime, we pray fervently for all those who died and for the families, friends and communities who grieve for them.

We heard about a different kind of “violence” and “terror” in today’s First Reading. The entire nation of Israel had been defeated and then captured and taken away to Babylon to live in exile for several generations. That was the circumstance they were dealing with when the Prophet Baruch brought the message of Advent to them as well, saying: *Jerusalem, take off your robe of mourning and misery; put on the splendor of glory from God.....for God is leading Israel in joy, by the light of His glory, with His mercy and justice for company.”*

We can never allow the circumstances of our present lives to keep us from looking forward to what it is that God wants to accomplish in our lives in the future.

The classic Advent figure---John the Baptist---makes his appearance on this Second Sunday of Advent as we heard in today’s Gospel passage. It’s important to realize that St. Luke went to great lengths to historically situate the coming of John the Baptist upon the scene in relation to those political and religious leaders of the day: Tiberias Caesar, Herod, Pilate, Annas and Caiphas, and all the others who, interestingly enough, would also be the ones who would play such a significant role in condemning Jesus to His suffering and death just three years later.

John the Baptist’s message is one that we know off by heart: *“Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight His paths.”* He goes on to tell us that we need to make the *“winding roads...straight and the rough ways...smooth.”* That was pretty much the same message that we heard Baruch giving in today’s First Reading *“that every lofty mountain be made low, and that the age old depths and gorges be filled, (so) that Israel may advance secure in the glory of God.”*

The point is that our God wants to do everything possible to make His coming to us, and our coming to Him, as smooth, as clear, as easy as possible. And so a big part of what we should be focused on during Advent---- besides getting all our Christmas shopping, decorating and baking done----is to make sure that whatever “mountains of worries, anxieties, traumas or fears” that we are experiencing in our lives, or whatever “valleys of depression or anger or hard feelings” we might be harboring, that we can level them out, raise them up, smooth them over---whatever it takes so they’re not in the way of God coming to us and our going to Him. The

Advent message is that God wants to be one with us, and He longs for us to be one with Him---- He wants to extend His love and mercy to us and forgive us of our sins so that we can be reconciled with Him and with others. Advent is all about God's unconditional love and infinite mercy

On Tuesday of this week, we will be celebrating the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception, a Holy Day of Obligation. On that same day, the entire Church will enter into a special Extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy which Pope Francis has called. The purpose of this special Year of Mercy is to focus on how much God loves us and wants to extend His mercy to us; but also, because God gives us mercy, even though we don't deserve it, that we should also be doing everything we can to be Instruments of Mercy to those in our lives who offend us.

There will be many different ways that we will be observing this Year of Mercy, but a very important one is the Holy Door of Mercy. During every Holy Year (which normally come every 25 years), there is a special door at St. Peter's Basilica in Rome which is normally kept closed and sealed during the 24 years that it is not a Holy Year, and opened only during the Holy Year. On Tuesday at St. Peter's in Rome, Pope Francis will open that Holy Door and make it available to be a special place of grace and Indulgence for pilgrims who go there anytime during this Jubilee Year of Mercy. But during this Jubilee Year, Pope Francis has determined that every Cathedral in every Diocese throughout the world is also to designate a Holy Door for people locally to be able to avail themselves of these special graces and indulgences. Here in our Cathedral, we have designated the door at the far left of the main entrance as our Holy Door, and I will ceremoniously open this Holy Door at the Vigil Mass next weekend. And from that day until the end of the Jubilee Year next November 20, 2016, people from all over the Diocese will be invited to come here on a spiritual pilgrimage to pass through that Holy Door as a metaphor of passing through Christ into a deeper life of faith---and as a more generous instrument of God's mercy.

There are many other ways for us to make sure that we observe this Year of Mercy as well as we possibly can. Spending more quality time in prayer and reflection on God's Holy Word, regularly examining our own consciences to try to root out any acts of rash judgment or the harboring of grudges so that we can be more merciful to others, and going out of our way to put into practice the spiritual and corporal works of mercy would be some very concrete ways for us to observe this Jubilee Year.

During this beautiful Season of Advent, and as we begin this Extraordinary Year of Mercy, let us focus on working hard to make the present circumstances of our lives as consistent with the loving and merciful ways of God as we possibly can, even as we continue “waiting in joyful hope” for all that God wants to bring about for each of us in the Life of the world to come.

God bless you, now and always.