

SPIRITUAL LIFE

Second Sunday of Advent

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Gospel Summary

Mark presents his gospel as an account of the “good news” because it announces the divine initiative to bring about a new creation where peace and harmony will prevail over pride and violence. This new beginning occurs at the coming of Jesus and easily transcends the original creation in scope and significance. If in fact God’s dream for a world of peace and justice has not been fulfilled, it is due entirely to the obstacles, which we have placed in its path.

And so, when Mark tells us that the career of John the Baptist was described already in the words of Isaiah, he is also telling us that opening the road for the coming of the Lord is still a major problem. We are still preventing the coming of the Lord by refusing to open ourselves to the radical implications of the message of Jesus.

It is for this reason that the baptism of John is called a baptism of repentance. It represents an expression of regret for having refused to accept fully the implications of the coming of the Lord. On the other hand, it has a positive aspect also which is a declaration of personal readiness to make room in our lives for the Lord, however costly that may be.

In this way, we can be prepared for the new baptism of Jesus, which is not only in water but also in the Spirit. This implies a full and conscious acceptance of the teaching of Jesus, which would result in putting aside self-centeredness and beginning to be more loving and caring toward others. If that really happened, we would soon see what the new creation would be. For, as Chesterton once said: “Christianity had not failed; it just hasn’t been tried!”

Life Implications

One of the major ways in which we prevent the coming of the Lord is our fear that, if we don’t focus our attention primarily on our own interests, we will lose control of our lives and be pulled apart by the needs of others. We are afraid that, like Humpty Dumpty, we will disintegrate if we don’t spend most of our time keeping ourselves intact. But Jesus says that we must become like that grain of wheat which allows itself to be consumed and thus becomes much more than it had previously had been (John 12:24). In the resurrection, God shows how all the pieces can be put back together and how a single, generous seed can become a wonderful harvest.

To be baptized in Jesus means to choose to commit oneself to live as unselfishly as one’s freedom permits which usually means a little more than we think is possible. This doesn’t mean that we should become doormats but it does mean that the needs of others must not be the last and least concern in our lives. In our words, it means to put our lives and our futures into the hands of a gracious God as we strive to make the love and gentleness of Jesus present in our world.

All of this may sound like a life of endless self-denial and very little fun or happiness. However, such a conclusion can be reached only by those who have not really tried to live by the wisdom of Jesus. The fact is that those who really care for others are the happiest people on earth. In this Sunday’s gospel, John the Baptist urges us to remove the roadblocks of fear and self-centeredness in our lives and thus assure a truly joyous Christmas celebration.

READINGS OF THE WEEK

Isaiah 40:1-11 2 Peter 3:8-14 Mark 1:1-8

December 7, 2014

靈 修 生 活

水 中 掙 扎

蔡 惠 文 神 父

一個男孩子在水中遇溺，拼命呼救掙扎。他的母親在岸上焦急萬分，高聲呼喊，希望能找到援手。那時，離她不遠站著一個深諳泳術、體格強健的青年人，他目睹一切，但似乎無動於衷，見死不救。過了一會，眼見男孩子已筋疲力盡，開始絕望地往下沉的剎那，年青人立刻跳到水裡把他帶回母親的身邊。「為甚麼你不及早救我的兒子？」母親心存感激的問。「太太，他拼命掙扎的時候，如果我去救他，只會連我也拉到水裡去；只有當他無力再掙扎，才是容易施以援手的時刻。」

若翰洗者身披駱毛，腰束皮帶，在約旦河為人付洗的形象已深入人心，如果他今天要出現在我們眼前，將是怎樣的模樣？我聯想起台灣鹽寮淨土的區紀復先生。記得多年前到他那裡體驗簡樸生活，發現從住的、用的到吃的每一細節，都與時下物質主義背道而馳。非經一番學習和掙扎，實在無法體味箇中的真我。一如若翰洗者，這種反潮流的生活方式，不單是一個先知性的標記，也是返樸歸真，重拾心靈原貌的具體改變。

按聖經學者的意見，若翰邀請人到約旦河受洗，為當時的猶太人來說，實在是一個先知性的標記。根據猶太人的傳統，他們只會為皈依的外邦人施行浸禮。籍著從水中出來的儀式，象徵受浸者決志加入一個昔日走過紅海的團體。若翰卻一改傳統，要求猶太人浸洗，以表達他們的悔改，及重申對天主盟約的承諾。若翰之所以選擇受浸作為悔改及新生的標記，因為水中的經驗不僅是一個儀式，本身也是一個重生的掙扎和事實。故事中的男孩子在水中遇溺，極力希望獲救。諷刺的是：他愈是執著不放，援手愈難以施展；反之，他愈是張手信賴，新生愈容易湧現。

其實，早於依撒意亞先知時代，以色列人已經明白，走過紅海不單是他們團體的標記，也是天主拯救的真實行動。那時，以色列人經歷了流徙巴比倫的惡夢，興奮地準備回歸故里，先知邀請他們在曠野中預備上主的道路，在荒原中為天主修平一條大路。(依四十 3) 這條「上主的道路」，一方面是指將要面臨的艱辛旅程，猶如當年他們的祖先逃離埃及，穿過紅海，進入曠野的經歷一樣。另一方面，「上主的道路」也是死亡與生命的掙扎，一條痛定思痛，重歸天主懷抱的悔改旅程。為準備這條道路，先知說：「一切深谷要填滿，一切山陵要剷平，隆起的要削為平地，崎嶇的要闢成坦途！」(依四十 4) 在昔日的有限條件下，相信先知的邀請，不是修築一條從巴比倫到耶路撒冷的高速公路，而是踏上一段充滿掙扎的悔改之旅。

因此，先知的經驗再次給我們肯定：生命與死亡的微妙關係，就像重投天主的懷抱一樣，只要我們不再在天主與我們之間自設障礙，天主便能與人同行。當我們拿走像深谷一樣無底的物質追求；像山陵一樣無止境的權位戀棧；像隆起一樣的自我膨脹；像崎嶇一樣的居心叵測，便赫然發現天主的救恩原來就在足下。

如果若翰洗者的呼聲，代表著一個好消息，那麼，這個好消息同時是一個壞消息。因為要經驗天主的拯救，我們首先被邀請修直上主的道路，再次經驗以民昔日走過紅海，由死入生的掙扎。過程中我們要經歷若翰、耶穌，以至其他門徒一樣的死亡，與此同時，我們才會經驗若翰所預言的聖神。耶穌的聖神使我們在水中重生，好成為一個返樸歸真、心靈滌淨的標記。

摘自「公教報」

本 週 讀 經

二 零 一 四 年 十 二 月 七 日

依 40:1-11; 伯後 3:8-14 ; 谷 1:1-8