

LOOKING TO SUNDAY®

Sunday, December 4, 2016

Second Sunday of Advent

This email, entitled Looking to Sunday®, focuses on one or more of the scripture readings for the coming Sunday. It prepares readers to hear God's Word at Mass and it offers a point of reflection to consider in the days leading to Sunday. Looking to Sunday is written by Father Tom Iwanowski.

YOU BROOD OF VIPERS!

"You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath?" Very few preachers would look at out at their Sunday congregation and begin their sermon with those words.

Preachers who did address their congregation as a "brood of vipers" would most likely get a very negative reaction especially at this time of the year. Calling people a "brood of vipers" would hardly inspire them to generosity in the coming Christmas collection.

Yet in this Sunday's Gospel (Matthew 3:1-12), we meet a preacher who called the Pharisees and Sadducees who came to hear his words a "brood of vipers." Then he went on to tell them that they were in danger of being cut down like barren trees and thrown into the fire.

John the Baptist apparently had no hesitation when it came to preaching his message and no fear of offending those he felt needed to be confronted with God's word.

John the Baptist came out of the desert certain that God was breaking into the world in a dramatic way. The Messiah was about to appear, the one who would baptize with the "Holy Spirit and fire." Now was the time, as John proclaimed, to "repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

That repentance meant more than listening to his words, meant more than simply being washed in the Jordan River. It meant producing "good fruit as evidence of repentance."

As we hear of the preaching of John the Baptist in this Sunday's Gospel, we need to realize that John is also preaching to us. We are his congregation. We are the ones he is calling to repentance. We are the ones he is now challenging to show evidence of that repentance by our good works. We are the ones he is warning not to presume that we have it made because we are Christians and claim God as our Father.

John the Baptist called the Pharisees and Sadducees a "brood of vipers" not to insult or disparage them but to shock them out of their complacency and self-righteousness.

In this season of holiday parties, family gatherings, gift buying, and overspending, John the Baptist speaks his words to us. Not to lessen the joy of the season, but to remind us of what is most important this Advent. "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

© 2016 Rev. Thomas B. Iwanowski