

Second Sunday in Advent

A Message from Fr. Mark

Dear Parishioners,

The patron saints of the time of Advent are St. John the Baptist and the Virgin Mary. They help us to “prepare the way of the Lord.” In today’s Gospel, we hear that “John the Baptist appeared, preaching in the desert of Judea and saying, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!’” A desert is a dry, hostile, godless place. When we sin, our world becomes like that. When we sin our hearts become dry, hostile and godless. Our world is like that. Sometimes our hearts are like that. But John the Baptist has a solution: repentance and conversion. This means doing the difficult thing which is going out into the desert and finding the water of life. We enter into a penitential season in order to find God. We don’t have to camp out in the desert dressed in camel skin eating grasshoppers like John the Baptist. But we do have to repent. During Advent, this means occasionally getting away from the distractions and bustle of the holiday season in order to find a quiet place to pray. We can gather with others who also want to convert their hearts by attending Bible Studies or Parish Missions. If we do, we will find living waters and the desert will bloom.

Several years ago my father and I went to the desert for one of our annual camping trips. We went to Death Valley because we heard that they were experiencing a “super bloom” of wildflowers in the desert. This unusual event happens very rarely when the rains fall exactly at the right times in the fall and winter. There are certain plants that are known as “drought-escapers” because they have seed covered with a special growth-inhibiting sheath which protects them during dry years. They cannot germinate unless an inch of rain falls all at once, percolating through the rocky desert soils and saturating the seeds. These rainstorms wash away the growth-inhibiting sheath that covers these seeds so that they blossom in the spring. We were not disappointed, and we now have an album of photographs of Death Valley wildflowers!

The other patron saint of Advent is the Blessed Virgin Mary. She is the fruitful “stem” from which blossomed the Messiah, as Isaiah the prophet predicted: “A shoot shall sprout from the stump of Jesse, and from his roots a bud shall blossom.” (Cf. Isaiah 11:1) Both Mary and her husband Joseph were from the family tree of Jesse and King David, as we read in the Gospel of Matthew (cf. Matthew 1:1-16).

Today is December 8, the traditional day on which we celebrate the Immaculate Conception of Mary. The feast fell on Sunday this year and so it is transferred until tomorrow, December 9. Because of this transfer, it is not a holy day of obligation this year. It is not required to go to Mass tomorrow, but we will nevertheless have special Masses here in our parish since it is very special for our country as the patron saint of the United States is Mary of the Immaculate Conception.

O Mary conceived without sin, pray for us!

Fr. Mark