

## Second Sunday of Advent – Cycle A

December 5, 2010

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Good morning. It has been a long week. That is the only thing I can say. I was of course in Long Island all week preaching a mission. Then I drove to Orefield, Pennsylvania. Yesterday I thought I had to give one talk, but four talks to 300 men for a Men's Conference and hear confessions. I got in the car and drove six hours and got back last night. And as I was reflecting on the Readings and reflecting on the Second Week of Advent, and reflecting on our opening ceremony, the word we focus on this week is repentance. It is the same theme that Jesus preached, just as John preaches it today, "repent, the Kingdom of God is at hand" and this need in our heart for this repentance. We are first called to that repentance, then we are called to show evidence of that repentance. The Gospel and the First Reading gives us a hint of where this grace of repentance, who this grace comes from. First of all we have to focus on repentance.

Yesterday there was about 350 men at this conference; all good men. Young, old. One person came and confessions are usually the biggest thing that happen on any of these retreats, any of the missions or days of recollections I am doing. One particular man grabbed me and he kept grabbing me throughout the whole day. He was a very elderly man and he said, "Father this is the greatest day of my life. It is the greatest day of my life." because he made a good confession. He said it was the first time in his whole life, and he was in his nineties, that he ever made a good confession. He was giddy, jumping up and down throughout the day grabbing me and saying, "Father this is the most important day of my life. It was the greatest day of my whole life" because he made a good confession. All of these things that pulled him down he was free from. He was like a two year old jumping up and down unbelievably ecstatic because he finally came to where he could finally repent, to finally surrender. To finally come before the Lord after all of these years and finally get rid of everything.

You know most people go around with these masks on. These big masks and they think if anybody ever saw me for who I really am they wouldn't be able to love me. They wouldn't be able to forgive me. So the greatest thing that happens when a person goes to confession is when they are really true and they make a good confession and just these pious confessions. "It has been four days since my last confession." Oh stop it! It drives me insane these pious confessions. There is really no repentance there it is, "Oh I want to make sure that I am always in a state of grace." Okay, that is very good. I got it. But it is much more than that. It has got to be this surrender of my heart and my life and I am finally changing my life. So finally when you make a good confession and you finally put this before the Lord and He looks at you through the priest and says, "You know, you are still loved and now you are forgiven for all eternity. You don't have to look at yourself and your past anymore. You don't have to look at your sins anymore. You just look at Me." And you become giddy when that happens.

John the Baptist none of you would like him, right? Me neither. He didn't like people sometimes. Here come the Pharisees and the Sadducees and they are coming to get baptized. You would think he would be very welcoming, don't you? "Oh look they are coming. Isn't that nice?" No, he starts screaming at

them. That reminds me of somebody. And he says, "You brood of vipers. Who told you to come here? You show some evidence of your repentance. Don't just go through the motions. I could care less. You had better start showing evidence that you are ready to repent."

Yesterday when I was preparing the men for confession I always say, "You know, I have a good friend who is a Lutheran minister. We were in different seminaries at the same time and he is one of those who always says, "You know Larry, you Catholics are always confessing but you are never repenting." Then I always say, "You don't know what the teaching of the Church is. You can confess all you want. You are not forgiven until you repent." So let us say you go to confession but in your heart you have absolutely no intent on changing. You can go to confession all of the time. I can give you absolution fifty times, you weren't forgiven once. Why, because you did not have the gift of repentance. You didn't show evidence. You didn't have the intention that my life now will change. So when you and I go to confession and you say, "I missed mass on Sunday," what does that mean to be forgiven? You must have the intention you will never miss Mass again on Sunday. That is what is necessary, the teaching of the Church, to be forgiven. You can say, "I'll try." Try is not what God is asking. It says when you make the Act of Contrition, "Oh my God I am heartily sorry for having offended thee. I firmly resolve with the help of Thy grace to sin no more." Nowhere in there does it say I will try to sin no more. It doesn't say that. The teaching of the Church is clear – when you and I go to confession it must be a true confession with the intention that I will never do this sin again, period. Now, I our weakness we are going to fall because we are not perfect people. But we will fall much faster if we don't have the intention I am going to get this out of my life. Not by my grace right, but by the help of Your grace. But we have to show the evidence.

I will never forget in my own self, in my own going to confession, in my own struggles, when I was in college seminary. You know my personality hasn't changed much throughout the years. I have been like this my whole life. I remember sitting in the one of the classrooms up at St. Mark's and I am studying. All of the sudden my best friend at the time opens the door and he comes in. I was sitting at the teacher's desk and he comes at sits at the desk in front of me. He says, "Hi Larry." I said, "Hi. What?" And he said, "Do you know what the Word of God says, don't you?" You can tell a tree by its fruit." I said, "Yes." And he says, "And all your fruit stinks." That was not a very happy moment in my life. Here is a friend of mine looking at me and saying my fruit stinks. Was he right? Absolutely he was right. I'll never forget when he hit me with that it was like someone taking a sledgehammer and just punching me in the face with this sledgehammer. It is true. Absolutely, positively. So what I did was, I will never forget, I went to everyone in the seminary and this was a college seminary and there might have been about 45 guys in those days not all from Erie, but from all of the different diocese around. I remember I would go to each single person in this seminary and I would grab them and I would say, "You know someone hit me about me and my fruit stinking and I just want to say if I have hurt you in any way or if I was in any way offensive to you, I want to say I am sorry." I went to every single guy in the seminary and made sure I made peace with them so that my fruit in my life could change. I just couldn't sit there and think oh yea, my fruit stinks. I am sorry God. I had to do something to heal the fruit of my life stinking.

And so it must be with us. We have to show the evidence in our lives that we are going to change. That we show the evidence in our lives that something in me now is directed no longer towards myself but is

directed to being a slave of God. And the key of that we get told in the Gospel today. It is also in the First Reading today. Do you know what that was the key to repentance. It is a person. The Holy Spirit, thank you very much, the Holy Spirit. And when Jesus comes He is going to baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. And in the First Reading it talks about the Spirit of the Lord comes upon Him. So the key to truly repenting, the key to truly start showing evidence in our lives that we are people now on the other road is we stop trying to live Christianity by our own power. We stop trying to live it by, "okay I am going to try harder." It isn't going to work. It isn't going to work. Your trying harder isn't going to do anything except fill up your pride and say, "Look what I did. I tried harder. I conquered it." Now you have got pride which is the core of all sins so you are going to hell anyway. Are you going to surrender your struggle, your fight, your repentance and let the Holy Spirit give you the grace of this? Are you going to stop living by your power and by your strength and let the Holy Spirit take control of your heart and your life and live by His power and His strength. It is a humongous difference. One is we are doing it ourselves. We are trying to get to Mass. We are trying to be good people. We are trying the best we can to live a good life, still a pagan, a good pagan, but a pagan. Another one who everyday fully surrenders himself as much as possible to the Holy Spirit. Letting the Holy Spirit set them on fire. The Spirit of the Living God takes them and He is the one that shows evidence in our lives. That is the fruits of the Spirit. It shows the evidence in our life that we have a life surrendered to the Holy Spirit. Now this surrender is this daily, daily thing. Some days we will do better than others. But the evidence of us being surrendered to the Holy Spirit is what, our fruit.

So again we have to really have people in our lives honest enough with us. That is why it is good if you have a spiritual director or you have someone you know, your husband or wife or at least for guys you need another guy friend. For woman you need another woman friend who is spiritual. Who can give you a true account of your fruit. You ask them, "How is my fruit?" And if they say, "Oh, it stinks." "Okay, I still got changing to do. And of course we are all going to change. Of course none of us is going to be there completely. But we have to show the evidence that we are about to change because we are changing and our fruit is changing and the key to that is daily surrender to the Holy Spirit.

So today as the Lord call us again to come closer to Him this Advent as we start this new year. We need to be people who are repenting every day. We need to give evidence of our repentance by the way we are living. To have true repentance, not just the same old, same old I go to confession for the grace. I don't buy it. There is so much more needed than grace when people say I need the grace. No, you need to repent. You really need to repent is what you need to do. So you might have to go to confession everyday but there is a difference between repentance confession and grace confession. Grace confession is all about me and what I want. Repentance confession is, "Lord I am sorry for doing it my way and I want to do it Yours." Humongous difference. The key to that to bear this fruit is the Holy Spirit. So if I could make one suggestion and I have made this suggestion all nine years I have been here with you and with the Charismatic's even longer, daily surrender to the Holy Spirit. Say a prayer, daily surrender to the Holy Spirit. Don't just go through the motions. Surrender completely. Got it? Get it? Going to do it? You better. May each of you know His love today and forever, amen.