

Meditations

By John Baptist de La Salle

Second Sunday of Advent

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St. John the Baptist in Prison by Navarette

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GOSPEL: SAINT MATTHEW 11:2–10

(Notice: Advent being a season established by the Church to prepare the faithful to celebrate properly our Lord's coming into this world and to draw him into their hearts so that they may no longer live save by his Spirit, it would be very proper for us today and on the following Sundays to apply ourselves to prayer in order to prepare our hearts to receive our Lord, all the more because the Gospels of these three Sundays provide us with an opportunity to do this and urge us to do so.)

You must prepare your own hearts and the hearts of those you are charged to instruct to receive our Lord and his holy maxims.

2.1 First Point

Today's Gospel informs us that Saint John the Baptist, while in prison where he had been thrown by Herod's command, sent two of his disciples to Jesus Christ to ask him whether he is the Messiah. This gave Jesus Christ the opportunity to praise Saint John before the people; he ended by saying that John is the man of whom it was written: I am sending my angel before you, to prepare for you the path where you will walk.¹

You too, as well as Saint John, are angels sent by God to prepare a path for him, so that he can enter your heart and the hearts of your disciples. For this purpose you need to do two things: first, you must resemble the angels by your interior and exterior purity. Like the angels, you must be entirely detached from your body and from the pleasures of the senses, so that nothing seems to be left in you but your soul, which you are concerned about exclusively and which is the only object of your care.

For you are destined by God to apply yourselves, like the holy angels, only to what refers to his service and to the care of souls. In you, as Saint Paul says, the outer man must decay, so that the inner man may

be renewed day by day.² You must become like the angels and like them, as the same Apostle says, not consider things that are visible but only those that are invisible, for, he continues, the former are temporary and pass away, whereas the latter are eternal³ and will be forever the object of our affection.

2.2 Second Point

Jesus Christ highly praises Saint John in the Gospel of this day. He says that John lived in the desert and was no reed shaken by the wind,⁴ because he always continued the life of penance he had begun. He says that John wore no soft garments,⁵ for as we read in Saint Matthew, he was clothed in camel's hair and wore a leather belt around his waist.⁶ Jesus Christ further adds that Saint John ate no bread and drank no wine;⁷ in fact, as we learn from Saint Matthew, he lived only on locusts and wild honey.⁸ Jesus Christ then declared that there has never been a Prophet greater than John the Baptist.⁹

Why, do you think, did Jesus Christ praise Saint John so highly? It was to lead the people to accept his teaching and to make them understand that what John had said about himself was true: that Saint John had been sent to prepare their hearts to receive Jesus Christ and to profit by his teachings. This saint, who was Christ's precursor, began by living a life of seclusion, prayer, and penance to practice what he wanted to teach others and thus to dispose his own heart to receive the fullness of the Spirit of God in order to make himself fit to carry out his ministry properly.

Because you have to prepare the hearts of others for the coming of Jesus Christ, you must first of all dispose your own hearts to be entirely filled with zeal in order to render your words effective in those whom you instruct.

2.3 Third Point

After having prepared himself interiorly to preach to the Jewish people and in order to make them ready to receive Jesus Christ, Saint John proposed to them six ways to prepare a path and an entry into their hearts for Jesus Christ. First, he required of them a true horror for sin, reproaching them with being a generation of vipers.¹⁰ Second, he urged them to fear the Last Judgment, assuring them that at that

moment their sins would be closely scrutinized and strictly judged. Flee, he urged them, from the wrath to come.¹¹ Every tree that does not bear good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.¹² Third, to help them escape the rigor of that judgment, he incited them to do penance by the words: Bring forth worthy fruits of penance.¹³ Fourth, he did not want them to be satisfied with lamenting their sins and doing penance for them; he wanted them to do good works, without which their penances would be of no avail. This he pointed out to them by these words: Every tree that does not bring forth good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.¹⁴ Fifth, he declared that it was not enough for them to claim Abraham as their father, that they had no right to glorify themselves on that account unless they acted as Abraham did. Do not say, he told them, we have Abraham for our father.¹⁵ Sixth, he gave them to understand that they could not be saved, whatever good deeds they might perform, unless they practiced the good works proper and becoming to their state of life. For this reason he pointed out to the wealthy their obligation of giving alms;¹⁶ he told the publicans not to exact anything beyond what was due,¹⁷ and he enjoined on the soldiers to be content with their pay.¹⁸

Take these counsels to heart, and follow them carefully; pass them on to your disciples and see to it that they practice them.

1. Mal 3:1
2. 2 Cor 4:16
3. 2 Cor 4:18
4. Mt 11:7
5. Mt 11:8
6. Mt 3:4
7. Lk 7:33
8. Mt 3:4
9. Mt 11:11
10. Lk 3:7
11. Lk 3:7
12. Lk 3:9
13. Lk 3:8
14. Lk 3:9
15. Lk 3:8
16. Lk 3:11
17. Lk 3:13
18. Lk 3:14