

2nd Sunday of Advent - (Year B) – December 10, 2017

IS 40:1-5, 9-11; PS 85:9-10-11-12, 13-14; 2 PT 3:8-14; MK 1:1-8

Schizophrenia is defined as: *a mentality...characterized by inconsistent or contradictory elements.*

Society as a whole, these days, is becoming more and more schizophrenic... especially across **most of Europe** and in **America**.

On the one hand, most people are troubled by how quickly the moral foundation of society—and the stability that such a moral foundation provides—is crumbling beneath their feet. Even *unbelievers* crave a **respite from the world's evil**, whether it be **Islamic terrorism**; the **nuclear threat from North Korea**; the seemingly endless string of **mass shootings**; the violent “*flavor of the day*” **manufactured protest**; or the **political bickering** that now makes it impossible for opposing sides to even communicate civilly.

Most people *recognize* the **problems**, but few are willing to **give up**, let alone even *acknowledge* those things in their own lives that they stubbornly hold onto, that **cause**—or at least *contribute to*—the very conflict that makes them **anxious** about the *future*...and **miserable** about the *here and now*.

The most easily identifiable expression of **societal schizophrenia** is in the realm of **sexual libertarianism**. On the one hand, **sexual libertarians** espouse the view that “**I can do...or...be whatever I want with regard to my sexuality**”. On the other hand, these same folks condemn others who live by **the same creed**, but who just happen to get *caught* doing something considered offensive or destructive. Their **willful blindness** to the link between their **worldview** and its **destructive consequences** would be humorous...if it weren't so damaging to **everyone** and **everything** in its path.

So, for example, a lot of people mocked the **Vice President of the United States** for his refusal to dine alone with a woman who is not his wife. They called him **immature** and **prudish**. These **same folks** just as quickly denounce the Harvey Weinsteins of the world, who take advantage of women due to their positions of influence over the women, *even as the Vice President's actions are designed to protect against the very thing these people condemn*.

You just can't win when dealing with **societal schizophrenics!** They are so blind that they can't see how their own worldview *enables, encourages* and, in some sense, even *creates* "**Harvey Weinstens**". They ridicule **one** man who lives in a **deliberately disciplined manner to protect his marriage**, and then act "outraged" when **another** man, who practices what *they* preach, acts like an **animal**.

It should be obvious that a society **literally** goes *insane* when it voluntarily discards its **moral foundation**, and even more so, when it evicts the very **God who gave us** the moral guideposts. **A sick society insists on the freedom to sin and then pretends to be shocked when the natural consequences of that sin destroy that same society.** It's like the protestors and looters who burn and plunder *their own neighborhoods* to make their pointless point...but on a much larger **moral and spiritual** scale.

In addition to resenting what they see as **God's "intrusion"** on their pursuit of **unrestricted sexual pleasure**, fallen humanity often blames God for what it considers his *inaction* in the face of **evil**, but what is really his immense **patience** with us.

We **expect** and even *demand* that God fix the problems in the **world**...and in our *lives*—and we get angry at **him** for not fixing them **NOW!** But if God were to act in **strict justice** today, *many people would go to Hell because they haven't repented of their sinful ways.* **St. Peter** articulates this perfectly in our **2nd Reading** for today:

Do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years and a thousand years like one day. The Lord does not delay his promise, as some regard "delay," but he is patient with you, not wishing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief... (2 Pet 3:8-10)

Here's a simple, but often ignored fact:

We have to get right with God before we can get into Heaven!

God desperately wants to heal us of **this deadly disease we carry**—the **sickness** called *sin*—before it's too late for us to **be** healed. He wants us to be in Heaven, but he knows that **if we persist in our spiritual schizophrenia**, we won't make it. **He** knows—even if *we* don't—that Heaven is not a **guarantee**—Heaven is a *choice*.

And God, in his **perfect justice** and **infinite mercy**, will give us whatever we choose—**Heaven or Hell**—when our time comes to stand before his Son Jesus—the Judge of Souls.

Human beings too often create a **false dichotomy** between God’s **justice** and his **mercy** because, quite frankly, most people want **mercy**, but they *don’t really* want **justice**. In Christianity, the person who wants *mercy without justice* says things like:

“I can confess directly to God...I don’t need to confess to a priest”.

This is the default position for **Protestants**, as we know, but it is more common among **Catholics** than you might think! If you don’t believe me, just compare the number of people who line up for **Holy Communion** at Sunday Mass, to the number of people who line up for **Confession** during the week, and you’ll quickly realize that **many**, if not *most professing Catholics* are actually *Protestants in practice!*

If such people are even self-aware enough to **admit** that they *sin*, they *then* convince themselves that it’s sufficient to confess privately...and call *that* **mercy**. But it’s a *cheap mercy*...perhaps even a *false mercy*. Because it excludes **justice**, which includes **accountability** to someone other than ourselves.

Jesus established the *means* for such **accountability** when he endowed his *first priests*—his **Apostles**—with *his own authority* to forgive the sins of others in the **Sacrament of Confession**. You can see where Jesus did *that* in the **Gospel of John—Chapter 20**.

God’s justice, then, is to give us **in the afterlife**, what we *demonstrated*—by the way we lived our lives here—that we **really** want. If we **profess** our Catholic faith with our **lips**, but *live* as though **God doesn’t exist**—that is, if we practice what **St. John Paul II** called “*practical atheism*”—then we will spend eternity separated from God. “**Eternity separated from God**” is just another way of saying “**Hell**”.

What is it, **really**, that makes us think we would **choose** in the **afterlife** what we *rejected* in **this life**? If a genuine relationship with God was *not* a priority for us on **earth**, then it won’t *magically* become a priority for us when we die.

So, then, if God’s **justice** is to give us—in **eternity**—what we actually *want*—for good or for ill—then what constitutes his **mercy**?

God's **love** for us is so **immense**, and his **mercy** so **great**, that he gives us *everything we need* to make it to Heaven. He gives us **time to repent** before the **Final Judgment**...he gives us a clear **warning** in Sacred Scripture of consequences both good and bad...and he gives us the **grace**—that is, *his own power and life* working within us—to become the holy people he created us to be. And if we **fall**—*and fall we will*—he gives us the **means** to be picked back up and set back on our feet.

But above and beyond even all that, Jesus gives us *himself* in the **Holy Eucharist**, to nourish, strengthen and sustain us for the full marathon we call human life.

In today's Gospel, we see **John the Baptist fulfilling**—*in his own person*—**Isaiah's prophecy** in the **1st Reading**. John is the one who “**prepares the way**” for the coming Messiah. The Gospel shows us *how* he did it:

John [the] Baptist appeared in the desert proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. People...were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the Jordan River as they acknowledged their sins. (Mk 1:4-5)

The *way* that John prepared the people was through a **baptismal ritual of repentance**, that *included* the **acknowledgement of sins**. *But this ritual was not an end in itself*. It was merely a **preparation** for something much greater—Baptism with the Holy Spirit—administered by the **Messiah** himself—which went *far beyond the ritual in its effects*.

Jesus' Baptism is not just **symbolic**...not just **restorative**. It's **re-creative**. It *makes us* members of his Mystical Body and adopted sons and daughters of God the Father. “**Baptism saves us**”, as St. Peter wrote in his 1st New Testament Letter (cf. 1 Pet 3:21), because it makes us part of Jesus who conquered **sin** and **death**.

In a similar way—for the baptized—acknowledging our sins and expressing our sorrow to Jesus **privately** is merely a **preparation** for the greater “**Baptism of Mercy**” that Jesus administers to our soul in the **Sacrament of Confession**. Jesus' mercy in the Confessional restores our soul to the same beauty and purity it enjoyed the moment we were baptized.

The person, then, who goes no further than **confessing privately**, is like a person

who would have received John the Baptist's **baptism of repentance**, but never followed through to receive Jesus' Baptism with the Holy Spirit!

Confessing is no more a private affair today than it was in John the Baptist's and Jesus' time. The people who repented back then weren't sitting at home **thinking** about it and confessing to *themselves* and calling it "good". They *went out* to John so he could prepare them for Jesus!

Think of it **this** way.

John's Baptism is to **Jesus'** Baptism, what the **Examination of Conscience** is to the Sacrament of **Confession**.

The first is a *preparation* for the second—*not* an **end in itself**.

Why else would Jesus give **his own power and authority** to others—namely his **Apostles**, their **successors** and those they ordain to the **priesthood**—if "*do it yourself confession*" were sufficient?

Let's listen again to Isaiah's prophecy:

A voice cries out: In the desert prepare the way of the LORD! Make straight in the wasteland a highway for our God! Every valley shall be filled in, every mountain and hill shall be made low; the rugged land shall be made a plain, the rough country, a broad valley. Then the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together; for the mouth of the LORD has spoken. (Isa 40:3-5)

The glory of the Lord **was** revealed—visibly—the **first time** in the *birth of Jesus*. The glory of the Lord **will be** revealed at the **end of time** when *Jesus comes in power and glory* to judge the living and the dead. The glory of the Lord **is** revealed in **our time** when we allow the Lord Jesus to **restore us to grace and to feed us** with his own **Body** and **Blood**.

In the famous **Advent Hymn** entitled *On Jordan's Bank*, the second verse serves as our marching orders for this great **Season of Preparation**:

Then cleansed be every life from sin: make straight the way for God within, and let us all our hearts prepare for Christ to come and enter there.