

New Brighton, Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> December 2022

## 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Advent

In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

All along our holy expectation of Christmas night, and our salvation to come, we are offered, from the 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Advent until the 4<sup>th</sup>, the figure of St John the Baptist. He's here, preaching before the Lord, preparing the way, making straight the paths before the Lord's coming.

We read in the Visions of Blessed Anna Katharina Emmerick, that St John the Baptist prepared the way of the Lord in a real, physical way, walking on the same ways The Lord would use, removing the stones and thorns where he should place his feet, preparing with a particular care the place of the Baptism of Our Lord.

The voice we hear all along this Advent would like to prepare our souls in a similar way. The two testaments are teaching us through parables and actions of our ancestors in Faith, of Our Lord, and because they are included within the Divine Word of the Bible, they are for our contemplation, meditation, and to be put into practice in our own life.

This Advent, this time of expectation, is a time of purification. Our interior garden is in need to be looked after, to be tidy, cleanse of any weed, or distorted tree we may let grow without paying attention, or because we particularly love it, and don't want to get rid of it. This tree, which view damages the view of our baptised soul, is the sin we are too attached to seriously attack and definitely remove, the sin we regularly confess, but in the same sentence, excuse, covering it with habits, situations.

Let's listen, on that very matter, what St Francis de Sales was saying to his people for an Homily on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Advent, 402 years ago:

"Many confess and deny at the same time. By this I mean that many confess their faults, but in such a way that at the same time that they accuse themselves they excuse themselves. They admit that if indeed they committed the fault which they now acknowledge, they certainly had reason for doing so. Not only do they excuse themselves while accusing themselves, but they accuse others as well. "I became angry and consequently committed such a failing, but I had good reason for it; they made me do or say such a thing; it was for such a reason." Is it not clear that in confessing in this way one is denying it at the same time? Say simply: "It was through my malice, my impatience and ill nature, or the result of my passions and unmortified inclinations that I committed such and such a fault." Do not say: "I have spoken ill of others, but it was on matters so obvious that I am not the only one who said or saw it." By this kind of talk we deny being guilty of the fault of which we accuse ourselves!"<sup>1</sup>

Here, is where the model of St John the Baptist can truly help us. After Our Lady and St Joseph, he is THE example for the practice of the virtue of Humility. In the Gospel we just read this morning, he gave us this direction, by rejecting the temptation which was offered to him by the scribes and pharisees. When we carefully pay attention how they came to him, and

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<sup>1</sup> Sermon for the Third Sunday of Advent, 13<sup>th</sup> December 1620

also because we've been used to see their tricks as they were denounced by Our Lord, we can see their malice saying:

"We are here, sent in the name of the scribes and Pharisees and the whole republic, to say to you that the prophecies are fulfilled and that the time has arrived for the Messiah's coming. It is true that we see among us many persons who live well and are very virtuous, but we must confess that we have not beheld anyone like you or anyone whose works so delight our hearts. In short, we believe that you are the promised Messiah. If you are He, we beg you neither to deny nor to hide it any longer, for we have come to pay you the honour that you deserve."<sup>2</sup>

But St John, seeing the trap, instead of being angry at them, humbly confessed that he was not the promised Messiah, and humbled himself, announcing the coming of Christ, the one who "in the midst of you (...) has stood (...), Whom you do not know. He it is Who is to come after me, Who has been set above me, the strap of Whose sandal I am not worthy to loose."<sup>3</sup>

St John was proposed the last temptation of Christ, the honours of life, but didn't even look at it, as he was completely crushed in Humility for the Love of the Saviour.

The practice of the virtue of Humility will lead us to perfect Charity, as per St John the Baptist's life. Here again, St Francis de Sales relates us the following story from the life of the Fathers in the desert:

"Many of these good religious had at one point assembled and were talking together familiarly in a spiritual conference. One of them was highly praising obedience; another, charity; a third, patience. Hearing what all his brothers said about these virtues, one of them added; "As for myself, it seems that humility is the first and most necessary of all." He made the following comparison which is my sermon here: "Humility and charity are united like John the Baptist and Our Humility is the forerunner and the precursor of charity, St. John the Baptist was of the Saviour. It prepares the way; it is the voice crying out: 'Make straight the way of the Lord.' And just as John the Baptist went before the Messiah, so also must humility come in order to empty hearts that they might then receive charity, for that can never dwell in a soul in which humility has not first prepared the lodging for it."<sup>4</sup>

Let's humiliate ourselves, following the example Our Holy Mother the Church is offering us today. With the great way of the tiniest of the virtues, we are upon a safe road, the safest one which leads us at the foot of the Crib, where our Divine Redeemer will be expecting us in a fortnight, lying in the cold to warm our hearts with the burning furnace of His Divine Charity.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, Amen.

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<sup>2</sup> Sermon for the Third Sunday of Advent, 13<sup>th</sup> December 1620

<sup>3</sup> John, I, 28

<sup>4</sup> Sermon for the Third Sunday of Advent, 13<sup>th</sup> December 1620