

Last week, Fr. Jose spoke about sin. It's something we do not hear about too often from the pulpit, and occasionally, we.... I.... need to hear it.

It is good for everyone to look into our own lives and consciences. To see how sin is able to harden our hearts, to make us indifferent to God, to others and to ourselves. The origin of sin is, above all, pride. We see ourselves as immune, free to do as we will and above the consequences of our actions.

Just as pride leads to sin, sin feeds the pride. We are found captive in our own cycles, prisoners, slaves of our pride and our passions.

Yet in every interior prison, there is a door, open wide right in front of us, but sin and pride can blind our eyes to it.

The Church has long taught that the virtue of Humility is able, not only to do combat with pride, but to subdue it, to hold ... it... captive.

People, as a rule, don't like humility very much. We don't understand it. It's seen as a weakness, something that just gets in our way.

But to properly understand humility, one must seek to understand one self, our warts and scars as well as our own beauty and goodness.

Honesty with ourselves is often far more difficult than honesty toward others. We often focus on the negative, which, in itself is not necessarily a bad thing.

But in order for these understandings to not become a source of self-hatred or for us to lose hope and become despaired we must also seek to understand God.

But when we are in darkness ourselves, it is far too easy to see God darkly.

We might see him as a harsh judge, one who would rather punish, one who is unapproachable. The Gospels affirm that God only wants us to come home to him.

And so He sends His Son as one of us, to shine as the light in a world of darkness, to announce the Kingdom of God has begun and to take us into the Father's loving presence.

The fruit of our self-understanding and coming to know God, not only in His power and majesty, but also in His unfathomable depth of love for each one of us, is strangely enough, humility.

True humility comes from seeing ourselves as we are, totally unworthy of this great God, yet set aside by Him for the showering of His graces and love. Humility is the knowledge of who and what God is, and the realization that we are not ... God.

Today's Gospel shows us a model of humility in John the Baptist. No one would ever accuse him of being a wimp. What he does at the Jordan took amazing strength of character.

Before the public ministry of Jesus, John was probably the most recognized personality of his day. Yet when he is mistaken as the Messiah, he readily admits that he is not the awaited King.

A man without humility might have been tempted to take advantage of the situation, set himself up as an earthly king, but not John. He knew God, he knew himself and he was humble, therefore able to point to the true Christ.

Notice that this Sunday, we light the pink candle of the Advent wreath. Today is known as Gaudete Sunday, a word which means "rejoice". It is a time to stop and **joyfully** acknowledge who we are in God and know His great gifts to us.

Today's first reading is one of the most joyful I have ever heard.

God the Father, speaking through Isaiah, tells us not only of His promise of deliverance, but is describing what that means, through and in the Gift of His Only Begotten Son.

Those gifts are good news to the poor, healing to the broken, liberty and freedom, and the favor of God.

Isaiah continues to announce that God will put joy in our souls, clothe us with salvation and wrap us in justice. He crowns us and jewels us and takes us as His own in His love.

The Responsorial Psalm is the Magnificat, Mary's wonderful prayer of praise and thanksgiving reminding us that God feeds the hungry, lifts up the poor, is merciful and just and is a God who keeps His promises.

God does this **for** us and **in** us through the gift of the God-Man, Jesus Christ.

The message of the readings today is unmistakable.

God loves you, promises the best for you, and that He will keep His promise.

What is our response? We are to live as humble children of the promise, to give thanks in prayer and thanksgiving and repentance, to not quench the fire of the Holy Spirit in our lives by doubt and despair.

Advent is a time to see our smallness and sinfulness, but also a time to see that God is always, ALWAYS greater than our sin, and that He desires to keep us safe and alive in Him both now and for eternity.

Today is a day of rejoicing in what God has done and what God will do for us, in the Living Word, the incarnate Mercy of God and the work of Salvation that is Jesus Christ, the One we await this season.

He IS the door in our prison of pride and sin, His light shows us the way out. Are we willing to walk into His freedom?