

REPENT AND REFORM

December 6, 2004

LEADER: In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. (Invite persons present to pause for a few moments of silent recollection and to offer any special intentions.)

In Sunday's Gospel we hear John the Baptist giving the people of his day some good news and some good advice. "Reform your lives!" "The reign of God is at hand!" We have even better news. The kingdom of God is not just near, it is already here. Jesus - by his life, death and resurrection - has established the reign of God. But the kingdom is not yet finished, so as a result John's advice to reform becomes very pertinent. Although the signs of Jesus' love are evident in the lives of many good people everywhere, even the best of us need to reform - to overcome anything in our lives that keeps us from loving God. In this second week of Advent, let us truly commit ourselves to build up the kingdom by ridding our hearts of greed, jealousy, prejudice, anger, suspicion and all those other feelings and attitudes that interfere with our love of others. Let us consciously make love, compassion, reconciliation, peace and joy the basis upon which we act throughout this season of Advent.

READER: In those days John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness of Judea, proclaiming, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near." This is the one of whom the prophet Isaiah spoke when he said, "The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.' " "I baptize you with water for repentance, but one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and will gather his wheat into the granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire." (Matthew 3:1-3; 11-12 Cycle A)

LEADER: Forgiving God, help us to remove all obstacles that keep us from being peace builders in Your Kingdom.

ALL: May Christmas find us ready and filled with joy at the coming of Your Son.

LEADER: Lord Jesus, you came to bring peace to our world and our lives. Sometimes our lives can become less than peaceful and in need of reconciling moments.

ALL: In your mercy, help us to live in peace with one another. Protect us in times of temptation and keep us from despair. Reveal to us the many ways we can build peace in our lives.

LEADER: Lord Jesus, fill us with patience and love, especially as we join the throngs of Christmas shoppers who seem to move so slowly. May we see others as you see them.

ALL: Jesus, you bring peace to our world and lives. May you be with us at this time of busyness to help us extend your peace to relatives, family, friends, co-workers and strangers whom we encounter in these busy days before Christmas. Encourage us to be at peace with you and with one another. Amen.