

Second Sunday of Advent 2016

December 4—It was an unbelievable mistake, and a newspaper editor's nightmare: a prominent individual picks up the morning paper and reads his own obituary. Somehow, facts and information had gotten confused, and the morning paper had mistakenly reported the news of the man's sudden, tragic, and very untimely death. What shocked him most was not just that the obituary was printed, but what was written and how he was described in the obituary. It told of the many ambitious scientific projects that he had undertaken, and the many weapons of war and destruction that could be credited to his name. All his life's work and all his contributions had left their marks indeed, but there was nothing of which he was proud.

My friends, the familiar Advent prophet and messenger of old named John the Baptist, whose voice we hear in today's Gospel [Matthew 3:1-12], did much the same for the people he spoke to then as he does for us now. He sent shock waves that day as He appeared in Jerusalem and took the city and its citizens by storm. The crowds were flocking to him, the people were being baptized, and even the leaders were being challenged to take stock of their lives, to own up to their sins, and to change the way they lived, for the Messiah was near at hand.

John the Baptist told them that One more powerful than he was about to appear and the world would never be the same again.

And how true it is, both then and now, that despite this recurring season of grace, despite Holy Mother Church prodding us, her children, to live lives of virtue, despite what we know is right and wrong, we are often “let off the hook” by a society and a world that has all but erased the notion of sin, and removed the reality of personal responsibility for our actions.

It is all around us now, we hear its cadence over and over, “It’s not my fault. I come from a broken home.” “It’s not my fault. I was made to do it.” “It’s not my fault. It was drugs, or alcohol, or both.”

The Evil One is having a field day with us as goodness is snuffed out and excuses to do “what I want, when I want, to whomever I want” are turned up.

But, just when we need him the most (and probably when we want to hear him the least), the prophet of the desert stands before us. He sends us a message loud and clear: that the time to change our lives is now, and that the Messiah is near at hand. All we need to do is listen ... and change!

By the way, the gentleman of whom I spoke at the beginning of this homily—the man who had the shock of his life when he read his own obituary

that described him in ways that he did not like—did not miss the opportunity at a second chance to change his life in the years he had left.

He took seriously the promise he had made to himself that sobering morning so that when he died, the world did not remember him as a man of war, but as a man of peace. In fact, we will never forget him and generations yet to come will continue to honor him, for his name was Alfred Nobel, the man for whom the annual Nobel Peace Prize is awarded.

My friends the time is short, and the chance is now ours, for the Advent Season us here. Let us repent of our sins and change our lives for the Messiah is near at hand.

God love you.