

Homily for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Advent  
December 9, 2018  
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Amber alert! Anyone who carries a cellphone or watches TV has heard and seen this message flash across their screen. AMBER is officially an acronym it stands for America's Missing: Broadcast Emergency Response it originated in the United States in 1996. It alerts we, the general population, that a Child Abduction Emergency or a Missing Person Emergency has occurred in or near our area. It tells us, Be watchful! Contact 911 if you see anything out of the ordinary. In this week's gospel reading, Luke describes John the Baptist's rather unusual ministry. John traveled through the whole region of the Jordan, and as foretold by the prophet Isaiah became, "A voice of one crying out in the desert: 'Prepare the way of the Lord.'" John's main purpose was to get people to prepare for the coming of the Messiah. He proclaims, "a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins." John the Baptist gives us an EMBER alert, that is Eternally Missing: Broadcast Emergency Response. Mark's Gospel echoes it but places the words on Jesus' lips after John's arrest, "This is the time of fulfillment. The Kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the Gospel."

This is the purpose of the Advent season: It alerts us to get ready, to prepare to celebrate the second coming of Christ at the final judgement. You see, if no one regularly alerts us to the second coming of the Lord—

if no one prompts us to prepare and be ready—then when Jesus does come again, we most likely will miss being ready for it and come up eternally missing in heaven. Last Sunday we were told, “Be vigilant at all times and pray that you have the strength to escape the tribulations that are imminent and to stand before the Son of Man.” We will not be able to avoid Christ’s ‘second coming’ so we better be ready for it.

Recently I re-discovered a wonderful book. It is titled Fundamentals of the Faith (1988, Ignatius Press) by Dr. Peter Kreeft, a professor of philosophy at Boston College. It’s been a number of years since I pulled this one off the ol’ bookshelf, and I had forgotten what an insightful book it truly is. In his chapter on Heaven, Kreeft explains that the most important question we will ever face is: “What must I do to be saved?” In other words, how do we get to Heaven? What is the entrance ticket to the eternal hereafter? At that most crucial moment in life—that is, at the moment of death—we will find out whether we had the right answer, and it most definitely is a pass-fail test. Kreeft says, “I am horrified to report that I’ve asked this question of hundreds of Catholic college students, and far fewer than half have known the answer.” He continues, “If anyone out there is unsure of the correct answer, then for the love of God get out your Bible and study for your finals! To save you time—since you may die while reaching for your Bible—I will quote God’s simple answer to the most important question in the world, how do I get to Heaven: Acts 16:31 says, ‘Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved.’”

When it comes to this most important question in the world, our modern culture tends to take two approaches: we either ignore it completely or over-complicate it. Many people are so focused on the present, they don't have time to think about the end of their lives, let alone next week. Unfortunately, tomorrow often comes, as St. Paul said, "Like a thief in the night," catching us totally by surprise. At that point, it will be too late. Others are really convinced, deep down inside, that they will never have to face death, judgement, heaven or hell. I'm not sure how they've reached this conclusion since the data from the last 5,000 years of recorded human history offers the following results – Death: 100%. Avoiding death: 0%. On the other hand, some people confuse the whole issue, insisting that a series of complicated rituals, novenas, rosaries, and rites are required to "earn" our way into Heaven. Well, a lot of these things can be a beneficial boost to our spiritual lives, but they are not the ticket to Heaven.

Our Lord Jesus Christ however said for us "to repent and believe in the Gospel." Perhaps we should believe Jesus and pay attention to Baruch and Paul. Reconciliation brings us back to Jesus and frees us from our captivity to sin. Reconciliation takes away our mourning and misery, frees us from guilt so that we can put on the splendor of glory from God forever. God is leading us in joy by the light of his glory, with his mercy and justice for company. Reconciliation restores our relationship with Jesus and opens our hearts to him so that, as Paul prays for us, "our love

may increase ever more and more in knowledge and every kind of perception, to discern what is of value so that we may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God.

Let's take Kreeft's advice this week. Let's grab our Bibles and discover God's simple answer to the most important question in the world. As it says in the one verse that summarizes all of Scripture, John 3:16: "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." That is the reason we prepare during Advent for the coming of Christmas Day. That is the message we are called to pass on to our families and friends. God gave John the Baptist a very important mission when He inspired him to be the herald announcing the coming of the Lord. We, the family of the church, also have an important mission to fulfill, to provide an EMBER alert, to our families and friends that the Messiah is coming again. Then our loved ones and friends may constantly be reminded of the identity of Jesus, constantly forewarned to not come up eternally missing in heaven, to be completely prepared for the most crucial moment in life, the moment of our' death.