

POPE FRANCIS HOMILY CYPRUS, 5 DECEMBER, 2021

On this second Sunday of Advent, the word of God sets before us the figure of Saint John the Baptist. The Gospel highlights two important things: the *place* where John appears, which is the desert, and the *content* of his message, which is conversion. *Desert* and *conversion*. Today's Gospel emphasizes these two words in such a way as to make us realize that they both concern us directly. Let us consider each of them closely.

The desert. The evangelist Luke introduces the scene in a particular way. He speaks of the solemn circumstances and the great men of that time, mentioning the fifteenth year of the Emperor Tiberius, the governor Pontius Pilate, King Herod and other contemporary political leaders. He then refers to the religious leaders, Annas and Caiaphas, who were serving in the Temple of Jerusalem (cf. *Lk 3:1-2*). At this point, Luke tells us: "The word of God came to John the son of Zechariah in the wilderness" (3:2). But how did that word come? We might have expected God's word to be spoken to one of the distinguished personages just mentioned. Instead, a subtle irony emerges between the lines of the Gospel: from the upper echelons of the powerful, suddenly we shift to the desert, to an unknown, solitary man. God surprises us. His ways surprise us, for they differ from our human expectations; they do not reflect the power and grandeur that we associate with him. Indeed, the Lord likes best what is small and lowly. Redemption did not begin in Jerusalem, Athens or Rome, but in the desert. This paradoxical approach tells us something beautiful: that being powerful, well-educated or famous is no guarantee of pleasing God, for those things could actually lead to pride and to rejecting him. Instead, we need to be interiorly poor, even as the desert is poor. Let us think more deeply about the paradox of the desert. John the Baptist – the Precursor – prepares the coming of Christ in this inaccessible, inhospitable and dangerous place. Usually, those who wish to make an important announcement go to impressive places, where they can be readily seen and address great crowds. John, on the other hand, preaches in the desert. Precisely there, in an arid, empty waste, stretching as far as the eye can see, the glory of the Lord was revealed. As the Scriptures prophesied (cf. *Is 40:3-4*), God changes the desert into a sea, parched ground into springs of water (cf. *Is 41:18*). Here is yet another heartening message: then as now, God turns his gaze to wherever sadness and loneliness abound. We can experience this in our own lives: as long as we bask in success or think only of ourselves, the Lord is often unable to reach us; but especially in times of trial, he does. He comes to us in difficult situations; he fills our inner emptiness that makes room for him; he visits our existential deserts. The Lord visits us there. Dear brothers and sisters, in our lives as individuals or nations, there will always be times when we feel that we are in the midst of a desert. Yet it is precisely there that the Lord makes his presence felt. Indeed, he is often welcomed not by the self-satisfied, but by those who feel helpless or inadequate. And he comes with words of closeness, compassion and tenderness: "Do not fear, for I am with you, do not be afraid, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you" (*Is 41:10*). By preaching in the desert, John assures us that the Lord comes to set us free and to revive us in situations that seem irredeemable, hopeless, with no way out; he comes there. There is no place that God will not visit. Today we rejoice to see him choose the desert, to see him reach out with love to our littleness and to refresh our arid spirits. So, dear friends, do not fear littleness, since it is not about being small and few in number, but about being open to God and to others. And do not fear situations of dryness, because God is never afraid to visit us there! Let us move on to the second word, which is *conversion*. The Baptist preached this insistently and forcefully (cf. *Lk 3:7*). This word too can be "uncomfortable", for just as the desert is not the first place we would consider going to, so the summons to conversion is certainly not the first word we would like to hear. Talk of conversion can depress us; it can seem hard to reconcile with the Gospel of joy. Yet that is only the case if we think of conversion simply in terms of our own striving for moral perfection, as if that were something we could achieve as the result of our own effort. Therein lies the problem: we think everything is up to us. This is not good, for it leads to spiritual sadness and frustration. For we want to be converted, to become better, to overcome our faults and to change, but we realize that we are not fully capable of this, and, for all our good intentions, we constantly stumble and fall. We have the same experience as Saint Paul, who in these very lands wrote: "I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do" (*Rom 7:18-19*). If by ourselves, then, we are unable to do the good we would like, what does it mean for us to be converted?

Here your beautiful Greek language can help us by reminding us of the etymology of the verb "to convert", *metanoein*, used in the Gospel. Composed of the preposition *metá*, which here means "beyond", and the verb *noéin*, "to think", it tells us that to convert is to "think beyond", to go beyond our usual ways of thinking, beyond our habitual worldview. All those ways of thinking that reduce everything to ourselves, to our belief in our own self-sufficiency. Or those self-centred ways of thinking marked by rigidity and paralyzing fear, by the temptation to say "we have always done it this way, why change?", by the idea that the deserts of life are places of death rather than places of God's presence.

By calling us to conversion, John urges us to go "beyond" where we presently are; to go beyond what our instincts tell us and our thoughts register, for reality is much greater than that. It is much greater than our instincts or thoughts. The reality is that *God is greater*. To be converted, then, means not listening to the things that stifle hope, to those who keep telling us that nothing ever changes in life, the pessimists of all time. It means refusing to believe that we are destined to sink into the mire of mediocrity. It means not surrendering to our inner fears, which surface especially at times of trial in order to discourage us and tell us that we will not make it, that everything has gone wrong and that becoming saints is not for us. That is not the case, because God is always present. We have to trust him, for he is *our beyond*, our strength. Everything changes when we give first place to the Lord. That is what conversion is! As far as Christ is concerned, we need only open the door and let him enter in and work his wonders. Just as the desert and the preaching of John were all it took for Christ to come into the world. The Lord asks for nothing more.

Our Lady of Divine Providence ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

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THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT "REJOICE SUNDAY"



HOLY MASS

Saturday: 05:30pm English, Church.

Sunday: 09:00am English, Church.
10:30am Creole, Church.
12:30pm Spanish, Church.

Weekdays: 05:30pm English, Blue Chapel.
(Except Wednesdays)

Fridays: 05:30pm Blue Chapel.
06:00pm Adoration Blessed
Sacrament and Rosary.

SCHEDULE OF SACRAMENTS

Baptisms: Contact one of the priests in person.

Confessions: Everyday before Mass or by appointment.

Anointing of the Sick: Upon request.

Marriage: Call the parish office for preparation before setting a fixed date.

1st Communions: Corpus Christi, 2022.

Confirmation: January 16, 2022.

Today is "Rejoice" Sunday. Rose coloured vestments can be used. (They are not pink!)They can only be used on the 3rd Sunday of Advent and the 4th Sunday of Lent. Why? Because in Advent Christ is soon coming at Christmas and it is to give all of us hope and courage as we have been seeing more deeply our selves and this can cause us to fall into discouragement. So, the Lord, in His mercy and through the Church gives us this "Break" one could say. The first reading and the psalm both reiterate this message. "The Lord has removed the judgement against you;" from Zephaniah, and from Philipians, "Rejoice in the Lord always". But how can this joy come to us? Well, listen to St. John the Baptist when he tells the sinners what to do. (That's us, by the way.) If you have 2 cloaks give one to someone who has none and the same with food. In other words get rid of some of your wealth and give it to help the poor. And if you are in business or in the bureaucracy or in some company, no cheating or corruption or stealing. There is often theft in the workplace and you can rationalise it by saying "I am not hurting anyone. Who will miss this computer" or whatever it may be. If you live a righteous life you will be able to rejoice, as the Lord is truly coming. Of course you need to listen to your conscience which accuses you and make reparation or simply reconcile with those you have hurt or with whom you are not in communion. Christ is coming, and we are still in the first part of Advent in which we hopefully begin to realise that we are not immortal, and will one day be judged. The grace of repentance and conversion of heart are always on offer but especially during this Advent season. Lord give us the grace of true repentance that we can deeply experience your joy at this great feast of Christmas which is also coming very soon.

Fr. Paul

CHRISTMAS SCHEDULE



ADVENT

Morning Prayer Monday to Friday: 6:20am Blue

Chapel

Novena of Nativity: Dec 16—Dec 24. 7:00 pm

CHRISTMAS

Friday Dec 24:

Christmas Eve 05:30 pm and Midnight 12:00 am

Saturday, Christmas day Dec 25:

09:00 am English and 11:00 am Multilingual

Friday, Dec 31: 05:30 pm

Saturday, Jan 1:

09:00 am English and 11:00 am Multilingual

The Parish Hall needs to be renovated and we need your help.

The Parish hall (old church) is finally being fully repaired and renovated. The roof was damaged since hurricane Irma and now is seriously affected by termites as well.

If you would like to help completet this project, the Lord will reward you a hundredfold for any contribution you make.

Donations can be made by check to **Our Lady of Divine Providence** or bank transfer through Scotiabank. Instructions in the link below:

<https://www.catholic.tc/donate.html>

Parish Events Dec.12-19

Sunday: **Holy Mass: 09:00am,10:30am and 12:30pm**
 04:00pm Coeur de Marie: Children's group.
 05:30pm Sacre Coeur de Jesus, P. Hall.
 05:00pm Fraternitey, Red Room.
 05:00pm Creole Youth Choir practice
 05:00pm Choeur D'hommes 1st and 3rd Sunday at church.

Monday: 05:30pm D. Mass Chapel
St. Lucy

Tuesday: 05:30pm D. Mass, Chapel
 07:00pm Advent Penance Service
St. John of the Cross

Wednesday: 07:00pm Christmas Concert performed by Holy Family Academy.

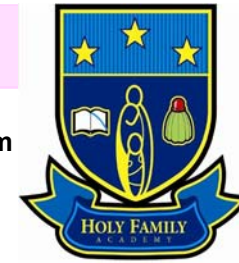
Thursday: 05:30pm D. Mass Chapel.
 06:00pm Creole Choir Practice Parish Hall.
 06:30pm English Choir Practice, D. Mass Chapel.
 7pm Novena of Christmas in Church

Friday: 05:30pm Daily Mass, Blue Chapel.
 06:00pm Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament & Benediction.
 06:00pm Confessions.
 7pm Novena of Christmas, Church

Saturday: 05:30pvm Mass, Church

Liturgy of the Eucharist NCW

07:00pm English: Church.



School Notes

Holy Family Academy

Tel: 649-941-7875

The students at Holy Family Academy have enjoyed the last days of the Novena which have helped to prepare and lead them to receive the coming of the Lord. The children have enjoyed every day of prayer and have learned of new ways to talk with God in their everyday lives. This season of advent has helped them to see that Christmas is not about asking for material gifts, but asking for graces from the Lord.

Dec. 13 HFA Christmas Play. School 5:pm.

Dec 15 Christmas Concert Church at 7 pm.

Dec. 15 1st Term Report Card Distribution

Dec. 16-Jan 2 School Closed

Jan. 3 Back to School, II Term begins.

www.hfa.catholic.tc

SPONSORS / BENEFACTORS

We continue to look for donations and sponsors to support our **Scholarship Program** and help the school with necessary supplies. Any help God will reward you a hundred fold. If you would like and are able to help contact us at holyfamilytci@gmail.com

You can also donate from the US in the following link:

<https://www.rcan.org/mission-turks-and-caicos-islands>

This is another way to help the missionary school or students who are in need, by donating any of the following:

- Tablets
- Hand Sanitizer / alcohol
- Paper hand towels
- 3 tricycles
- Tonner Canon ImageRunner ADVANCE C5255