

**Homily - Luke 3: 1-6**  
**Second Sunday of Advent Year C**  
**Sunday, 05<sup>th</sup> December 2021**

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It was Whit Sunday, 21<sup>st</sup> May 1972. A large group of people, as always, stood gazing at Michelangelo's Pieta in St. Peter's Basilica, Rome.

Well, for nearly five hundred years this white marble statue of Mary holding or cradling the dead body of Jesus has been admired and loved by people from all over the world. They have marveled at the delicate shape of Christ's body and at the beauty of Mary's sorrowful and youthful face.

Now, suddenly there was an uproar. A man carrying a hammer, jumped over the altar rails and attacked the famous statue. Before he was overpowered, he had hit it fifteen times. About fifty large pieces of marble and one hundred and fifty smaller ones lay scattered around the floor. The damage was very serious. Mary's left arm was broken off at the elbow and the fingers destroyed. Part of her nose was smashed. Her veil and left cheek were scarred in several places and her left eye was badly damaged. Sympathy, advice and money poured into the Vatican from many parts of the world. And a leading daily newspaper commented: 'The statue is ruined. It is beyond repair'.

But the head of the Vatican Museum was optimistic. He got together a team of seven scientists and restorers and they spent ten months repairing this unique work. Their first task was to gather up the fragments, even the tiniest, each of which had to be sorted and labeled. Missing parts had to be made from exactly the same kind of marble as the original. Federici and his dedicated helpers worked long hours in their laboratory. He said: “We felt just as though we were at the bedside of a person who was very sick and whom we loved very much. But there was joy in our hearts at being allowed to play a part in the recreation of this beautiful piece of art’.

At last, almost a year later, the work of restoration was complete. Except for a scar at the back of the veil, which was purposely left there as evidence of the attack, the Pieta was again perfect. On March 25<sup>th</sup>, 1973, on the feast of the Annunciation, it was put on public display once more. The only difference now was that the visitors had to look at Our Lady’s serene face through a bullet-proof glass screen.

Well! We are on the Second Sunday of Advent and this Sunday issues a great call to repentance. Yes! John the Baptist in today’s Gospel would call the people to repent as a way of preparing their hearts and lives for

the Lord's visit. To repent means to recognize our brokenness and our consequent need of redemption, and to turn to God. I suppose all of us in general are broken and fragmented, and I believe each of us in particular is damaged and wounded by sin. We have eyes that do not see, ears that do not hear, tongues that do not speak, and above all, hearts that do not love. And we know that many people suffer from anguish: the anguish of loneliness, inability to get on with others, and feelings of worthlessness. But God has not abandoned us or forgotten us. He is with us and the work of healing and restoring goes on in us and through us. In his unconditional love for us, He has sent us His own Son, Jesus our Saviour, Jesus our Redeemer.

The Advent season challenges us to prepare for the celebration of Jesus's first coming. And we are also to prepare for Christ's present "coming" to us in God's Word, in the Eucharist, in our neighbors, in the Christian community and in the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit in our souls. And finally, we are asked to be ready to meet Christ as our Judge at the end of our lives when Jesus will come with power and great glory, bringing our waiting to its everlasting completion. But the question is: Do we recognize Him when He comes to us in the ordinary events of our daily lives, in the here and now?

In a certain cathedral in Europe, there was a magnificent pipe organ that only the designated church organist was allowed to play. One day, while the sexton was checking the choir loft before closing the church, he heard the footsteps of a stranger climb into the choir loft. "Please, sir," begged the stranger, "I have travelled a long way only to be able to sit and play this marvelous organ. May I have your kind permission to do so?" "No," replied the sexton, "This instrument may be played only by one person. If I allow you, I may lose my job." The stranger understood, but appeared deeply disappointed. "But," he persisted, "may I play just a few chords? I promise it won't be long. 'A few moments' is all I ask." The sexton was moved to compassion and permitted that stranger to play the pipe organ, on condition that he stopped after a few bars. Moving to the seat before that magnificent organ, the stranger closed his eyes for a few moments, and then began. The touch of the Master made the music so delightful, that the sexton just stood there as though transfixed to the ground. He just couldn't believe his ears. The stranger was an accomplished musician and a brilliant organist. A few minutes later, the stranger stopped and slid off the stool. Gratefully he thanked the sexton for permitting him that rare privilege and began to walk away. "Wait," pleaded the sexton, "I have never heard

such music from this organ before. Please tell me your name?” The stranger replied, “Mendelssohn.” “What!” exclaimed the stupefied sexton, “are you truly the famous composer and musician, Felix Mendelssohn?” “Yes, sir,” replied the stranger, and then he modestly walked away.

Well! Dear brothers and sisters, we need to remember that Jesus comes to us in different ways every day of our lives and then He tells us: ‘A few moments’ is all I ask’. And every good turn done to another in need, is actually done to Jesus, who like Felix Mendelssohn, presents himself in a surprising disguise.

Every mountain shall be leveled, every valley filled in, every crooked road made straight, so that we will prepare ourselves for the coming of the Lord. In twenty days, we shall salute the feast when Heaven came to earth as a Child. As a fitting preparation for that feast this second week of Advent, why don’t we each attempt to reproduce Heaven on earth in the here and now? You don’t have to seek extraordinary things. The natural things of your journey of life are all invitations to live this season of Advent. Well! Dear friends, ‘Let Jesus’ into your life, and then He will be reborn in your hearts. God bless you all, **Amen.**

