

From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, "Repent! for the kingdom of Heaven is at hand."

Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. Repentance means to turn your life around. You've been going in one direction, but now you realize that's not the direction God wants you to go. He has called us to follow him.

To quit behaving and acting the way the world does. To repent and turn our life around and follow him. Why? Because the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

A man named Saul on his way to Damascus, Syria. At one point, he heard a voice of calling him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" He asked, "who are you, Lord?" The Lord answered, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.

Jesus sent Saul to see a man in Damascus named Ananias. Because of his vision Saul had gone blind. Saul was one of the greatest persecutors of the Christians at this time. He oversaw the execution of Stephen, the first martyr. And he was on his way to Damascus to search out other Christians and have them arrested and put to death.

He had developed a hatred for Jesus and his followers. Ananias had been given a vision where our Lord told him that Saul would be coming to Damascus and he was to find him and to heal him.

When Ananias found Saul, he healed him. Saul realizing that he was wrong about Jesus repented and asked to be baptized. He was given the name Paul and he became the greatest evangelists in the history of the church. He had repented and turned his life around. He no longer was an enemy of Christ now a follower.

If you remember Zacchaeus, who had climbed a sycamore tree to get a better look at Jesus as he was passing by. He was considered a great sinner.

Jesus called him to come down from the tree and told him that he was to dine with him. Zacchaeus suddenly became aware of how great a sinner he was and he repented. He turned his life around and became a follower of Jesus. He no longer went after the things of this world, but now sought the things of the kingdom of heaven.

At our Lord's trial, Peter cursed and denied that he even knew Jesus. He completely turned his back on Jesus. But during the trial, when Jesus looked at Peter, Peter was touched to the quick. He suddenly woke up and realized what he'd done. And what did he do? He repented, he turned his life around and became the leader of the apostles again.

While Jesus was hanging on the cross, one of the thieves that was being crucified with him, called out to him and begged his forgiveness. He repented of his way of live and Jesus told him that "today you will be with me in paradise."

During the reign of Emperor Theodosius, Domnica, (one of the saints that we commemorate today) was still unbaptized, came from Carthage to Constantinople with four other pagan maidens.

They had repented of their sins and turned their lives around and chose to become Christians. The Patriarch baptized them and gave his blessing to them to live as nuns.

With great zeal, St. Domnica gave herself up to a life of asceticism and in that zeal did not waver until her death in extreme old age. She died in the Lord about 474 A.D. She was so enlightened by the Holy Spirit that she was able to discern events in the future and through prayer to work miracles.

We too must repent of our sins. We must turn our lives around. We must be like the people whom I just told you about. They repented as our Lord called them to do, and became great in their service to God. Are we so afraid of serving God that we are willing to risk not repenting and thus ending up being refused entrance into the Kingdom of God at the Last Judgment.

Are we going to be like the rich young man who, although coming to Jesus asking Him what he must do to enter into the kingdom, was unwilling to change his life and follow Jesus? Jesus told him that, even though he had been obedient in all the laws, he was still lacking one thing. Jesus told him to sell all his goods and give them to the poor and follow him.

He was unwilling to turn his life around. Even though in the eyes of all the people he was a very holy man, he was unwilling to give this one area of his life to God.

What about us? Is there an area in our lives which we are not willing to turn over completely to God? Which door have we kept closed and not allow Jesus to enter?

Because the past is ever with us in the form of guilt and remorse; and because the future is always with us in the form of anxiety about future judgment, the only way out is repentance, a complete turnaround from self to God, from guilt to forgiveness, from anxiety to the peace of God that passes all understanding.

Repentance is more than just feeling sorry for what we have done. It is not enough to say "I'm deeply sorry, I've been going in the wrong direction." There is only one way to correct the situation; to make a complete turnaround and begin traveling back to God. To put our repentance into action.

When the prodigal son repented, he didn't just sit there and feel sorry for all his sins. He didn't stay where he was among the swine. He got up and left. He changed the direction of his life. He said, "I will arise and go to my father." And he did promptly.

"This life has been given to you for repentance," said St. Isaac the Syrian. "Do not waste it on other things."

God said through his prophet Isaiah, "Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other" (Isaiah 45:22).

"Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the Lord, that He may have mercy on him, for He will abundantly pardon" (Isaiah 55:6 – 7).

"As I live, says the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way of life; turn back, turn back from your evil ways..." (Ezekiel 33:11).

St. John of the ladder wrote: "We shall not be condemned at the end of our lives because we did not perform miracles. Nor because we failed to be theologians... Or because we have failed to achieve the divine vision... But because of one reason only: that we did not repent continually."

Turn back from self to God, from hatred to love, from hell to heaven, from death to life. Turn from self-service and self-concern to God-service and God-concern. We must turn from our pride, our smugness, our complacency, our self-appointed goodness. We must turn to total dependence on God, and His grace and power.

We must turn back to God and know that a Father's welcome awaits us. This is the same welcome that awaited the prodigal son when he said, "I have sinned... I will arise and go to my father." The same embrace. the same kiss. The same best robe. The same reconciliation. The same joy.

"Repent! For the kingdom of God is at hand."