

Homily: Second Sunday Advent, yr. B, 2020

In its October fifth issue, the editors of TIME Magazine compiled a list of the one hundred most influential people of 2020. The list included the expected names of leaders in politics, science, education, business and the arts. But the TIME list also included an individual whom few readers had heard of: a sixty-seven year old Mexican-American nun from Brownsville, Texas. Her prophetic voice is as challenging as St. John the Baptist's at the Jordan River. Sister Norma Pimentel is a Missionary of JESUS and executive director of Catholic Charities of the Rio Grande Valley. Sister Norma and her staff have assisted more than one hundred thousand migrants seeking refuge in the United States along the Texas border with Mexico. Sister Norma and her religious community began working with migrants forty years ago. The experience, she says, marked me for life forever. It triggered in me a profound sense of commitment and dedication to make sure that I become that voice for them, that I can be that force that can defend and protect life, especially the immigrants. Sister Norma herself was born in Texas, the daughter of Mexican immigrants. She says, she's a U.S. Citizen by Chiripa, "sheer chance". As a young woman, she studied art and design, but along the way, found GOD. And very quickly, her vocation propelled her to the epicenter of something that's nothing less than a humanitarian crisis along the border she has called home all of

her life. Though the number of incoming migrants may vary over the years, their reasons for leaving their home countries remain consistent. It's the gangs and instability and how easily they're abused, Sister Norma explains. They're afraid for their children, afraid of how easily someone can break into their homes and kill their children or themselves, if they don't cooperate, if they don't hand over their children to join the gang. Such instability also makes finding work more difficult, and families are often extorted for more money than they have, and so they are forced to work for gangs to pay off whatever is demanded. This soft-spoken nun possesses a passion about her work. Justice work to which all of us are called to be about. Work, that Sister Norma believes is centered in our connectedness to each other as human beings. In her work, Sister Norma Pimentel is a modern St. John the Baptist. She proclaims a prophetic word of hope to terrorized immigrants and a challenge of justice to the rest of us. Like St. John the Baptist, she is Preparing the way of the LORD, making straight HIS Paths. The spiritual writer, Jay Cormier writes: "To be a prophet of GOD'S Justice begins with embracing GOD'S Vision of what the world can become and then giving one's self totally and unreservedly to realizing that Vision." In Baptism, each one of us has been called by GOD to the Work of the Prophet, using whatever gifts, talents or skills we possess to transform the wastelands around us into harvests of justice. Baptism calls us to

create highways for GOD that allows HIM to enter and re-create our world in HIS Compassion and Peace. In other words, our everyday efforts to do what is right and just, our everyday efforts to walk the path of justice leading to right relationship with GOD and others, to live our faith with conviction and integrity, is to make straight the paths of the ONE, John Proclaimed, would Baptize with the HOLY SPIRIT. Son of Zechariah the priest, John doesn't deliver his message in the Temple as we might expect, or anywhere else in Jerusalem, but on the banks of the Jordan River. At this busy crossing place, so significant in the history of Israel's journey into the Promised Land, John urges the people to cross over into GOD'S Forgiveness through the waters of a ritual baptism of repentance. Through these waters of repentance, Israel is being called once again to enter the Promised Land, the Promised Land of the ONE John called more mightier than I, WHOM we are told at the beginning is the CHRIST, the SON of GOD. John's brief appearance in Mark's Gospel begins a new moment in the history of Salvation. Mark's details about John's appearance, recalls the great prophet Elijah, who is described in the Second Book of Kings as wearing a hairy garment with a leather belt around his waist. In the Jewish Community it was believed Elijah would return from Heaven to announce the long awaited restoration of Israel as GOD'S Kingdom. For Mark, and the other Gospel writers, this expectation is fulfilled in

John the Baptist. Through the Baptist's proclamation of ONE Mightier than I, the age of the Prophets comes to an end, and the Age of the MESSIAH begins. As an Advent people, we are caught - much like the Israelites returning to Jerusalem in our Reading from the Book of the Prophet Isaiah - between a world that is dying and a world waiting to be reborn. The work of Advent is to bring about that rebirth: to prepare a world that is ready for the LORD'S Coming. Right now, so much of the world is sick with a deadly virus, a virus that's getting worse by all reports. Thank GOD news of a vaccine is finally here. But so many are now filled with anxiety, so many wonder where the joy of this Season can be found. As Christians, we are a people of Hope. The GOD WHO has always fulfilled HIS Promises; will make good on HIS Promise to free us once again. The virus may be doing a pretty good job in tearing apart lives, families and communities right now; but it can never win. The fulfilled Hope of CHRIST'S Birth, Proclaims that, Loud and Clear. And ultimately, as an Advent People, we also look forward to CHRIST'S Coming Again, when HE will fulfill our History, and death and disease will be no more. So while a lot of unknowns are with us right now, the Faith and Trust of St. John the Baptist gives us Hope. Eventually, he will stare death right in the face for the sake of Righteousness. Only the knowledge he was doing the right thing gave him courage to persevere. Our Faith also empowers us to stare death

right in the face, As St. Paul reminds us, if GOD is for us, who can be against us? May this Advent Season, although a pretty difficult one right now, but a time of spiritual renewal for all of us, a time of deepened Faith and Trust in GOD, a time of renewing our Hope in the GOD WHO will never let us be overwhelmed by anything but HIS Love and Protection.