



Reflection from Fr. Garry

When the word "repent" is used in scripture, it means more than just being sorry for sins. It means a turning around of one's life. In the language of systems theory, it means second order change rather than first order change.

First order change is surface change, having to do with appearance rather than substance. This would be like a company which stops using plastic in its packing material, hoping that it will sell more stuff to ecologically minded people. Second order change has more to do with identity, purpose, and reason for existence. This would be like a company that stops using plastic in its packing material as one of many such practices because it wants to become a better steward of natural resources.

Religion has often promoted first order change and has sometimes neglected second order change. We have been taught to do the actions -- go to church, give to charity, abstain from meat on Fridays, etc. These outward signs were used to determine one's "goodness" or suitability as a church member, since inner change, or second order change, was so difficult to assess. Unfortunately, this has reinforced our human weakness of making decisions about people based only on what is on the outside. This is where prejudice comes from. It is also a reason people will vote for a candidate that says what they want to hear, and they don't or won't dig a little further to see what motivations the candidate might have lying just below the surface.

We need to shift more of our focus from outside to inside, and it must begin with ourselves. When we look beyond our appearance, behavior, successes, mistakes {what is outside}, we see what is really us inside, what is beyond change. We see what God created us to be. Only then are we able to recognize that same thing in others. At the same time we become more able to recognize how people hide their true self out of fear or insecurity.

Each of us has the same identity, purpose, and reason for existence because each of us is made in the image and likeness of God. We just need to practice recognizing it more.

Blessings, Fr. Garry
Lk 2: 22-40