

## House Cleaning vs. Heart Cleaning: Advent Edition

It's Advent, which means it's time to prepare—both our homes and our hearts. But let's be honest: cleaning the house is much easier than cleaning the heart. At least with house cleaning, you can see the dirt. Dust bunnies don't hide behind layers of denial or justify their existence with "That's just who I am!"

In today's readings, Baruch gives us a vision of God leveling mountains and filling valleys (Baruch 5:1-9). If only my vacuum cleaner could do the same! Instead, when the mountain of laundry piles up, or the "valley of dishes" deepens in the sink, I sigh, "Maybe tomorrow. Today is not the day for heroic efforts."

And isn't that just how we treat the hard work of conversion? Like that cluttered closet we avoid, we tell ourselves, "God loves me as I am. Surely, He's not asking me to open *that* door." But today's Gospel reminds us of John the Baptist's rallying cry: "Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight His paths!" (Luke 3:4). Straight paths? I'd settle for finding my kitchen table under the clutter.

Why do we resist cleaning our hearts? Because it's hard work! Just like scrubbing the bathroom grout, it's uncomfortable and takes longer than we'd like. And then there's that little voice whispering, "This isn't for you. Let the saints handle the tough stuff."

The Church Fathers were keen observers of this human tendency. St. Gregory the Great warns against spiritual procrastination: "**It is not enough to desire the grace of God; we must also work to remove obstacles to it.**" Simply put, God won't clean up our mess without our cooperation. He'll bring the grace, but He's handing us the mop.

Psalm 126 paints a different picture—one of joyful transformation. Those who "sow in tears" will "reap with shouts of joy" (Psalm 126:5). Yes, repentance can feel like a season of labor, but the harvest is worth it. Imagine walking into a clean home after weeks of chaos. Now imagine your heart—free of grudges, self-doubt, and spiritual clutter. That's the joy God promises when we put in the work.

So, how do we overcome the "that's not for me" mindset?

1. **Start small:** Maybe you're not ready to deep-clean the whole heart. Fine. Tackle one corner: a single habit, a single relationship that needs mending.
2. **Get a spiritual cleaning buddy:** Just like a friend makes spring cleaning bearable, a priest, counselor, or spiritual director can help you identify the "dirt" you're blind to.
3. **Keep your eye on the prize:** Baruch's vision of a restored Jerusalem and the psalmist's promise of joy remind us that God is working *with* us for something glorious.

This Advent, let's stop postponing the tough work of heart-cleaning. After all, as any seasoned procrastinator knows, dirt doesn't disappear when you ignore it—it multiplies. And unlike your junk drawer, your soul isn't something you can hide when company comes over. The King is coming! Time to roll up our sleeves and prepare the way.