

FATHER JOSEPH'S HOMILY – Second Sunday of Advent

The second Sunday of Advent focuses on the person of John the Baptist. Who is John the Baptist, and why is he important to us especially in this season of Advent?

In today's Gospel, we hear an extensive description of John's identity. He is clothed in camel's hair, wears a leather belt around his waist, and he feasts on locusts and wild honey. He lives in the wilderness near the river Jordan, where Jesus baptized. The baptism he offers for his people from the Judean countryside is a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. John's baptism is a call to the people of Judea, and those in the city of Jerusalem, to turn from their godless ways and receive the forgiveness that is present in God.

St Paul once asked; "How can people know about God if they have never heard of Him? And how can they hear if nobody is sent to them?" He holds the vocation of preaching as vital if God is to be known and loved. The primary intention of John was not to draw attention to himself, but to the one who is to come. He fulfills the role of the forerunner, the one who is called to make known the Messiah, the Son of God. We, too, are called to announce and make known Messiah in this season of Advent.

Basically, John the Baptist is a man of prayer and therefore, he is close to God. He understands that if we want to change the world, we have to start with ourselves. He led a simple life. In order to experience God who is with us, we also need to go for a desert-experience like John the Baptist...to be alone with God and pray. But to pray one requires certain aids.

Frist is **simplicity**. In an urban life, we are easily enchanted by what is pretty, plastic and superficial. In order to pray, we have to get rid of this excessive baggage because it blocks our way to Christ and to seeing things as they are.

The second aid is **silence**. We need to be still, to be healed of our disturbed spirits. We need a place of quiet in order to calm our tingling nerves and hear God speak.

The third aid is **solitude**. We cannot allow ourselves to be driven all the time by an instinct to perform, to produce, and to do surrounded by so many people and things. Sometimes we have to stand in solitude to discover who we are and who our God is.

John the Baptist is an authentic person. He lives what he preaches. By his lifestyle, his clothing and his eating habits, he shows that the meaning of life is not to be found in the abundance of material possessions but in relationship with God. Simplicity of life and detachment from unnecessary cares and worries of social life frees the heart for a personal relationship with God. To go into the desert is the first step in true repentance. It means abandoning our usual hiding places and putting ourselves in a situation where God can easily reach us. He is authentic because there was nothing shady about him.

My dear brothers and sisters, John's life reminds us also of our important task of announcing Christ to others through our lives, both at home and in the community. When we show real love, kindness, mercy and a spirit of forgiveness, we are announcing the truth that Christ is with us. Thus, our lives become a kind of Bible which others can read. John the Baptist invites us to turn this Advent season into a real spiritual homecoming by making the necessary preparations for the arrival of the Savior and his entrance into our lives.