

Sunday 2nd (B) of Advent

Gospel text (Mk 1,1-8): This is the beginning of the Good News of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. It is written in the book of Isaiah, the prophet, «I am sending my messenger ahead of you to prepare your way. Let the people hear the voice calling in the desert: Prepare the way of the Lord, level his paths».

So John began to baptize in the desert; he preached a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. All Judea and all the people from the city of Jerusalem went out to John to confess their sins and be baptized by him in the river Jordan.

John was clothed in camel's hair and wore a leather garment around his waist. His food was locusts and honey. He preached to the people saying, «After me comes one who is more powerful than I am; I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you in the Holy Spirit. As for me, I am not worthy to bend down and untie his sandals».

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Today, as the curtain of the divine drama rises, we can already hear someone shouting: «Prepare the way of the Lord, level his paths» (Mk 1,3). Today we meet John the Baptist as he sets the stage for Jesus' coming.

Some people thought John himself was the Messiah. He spoke like the prophets of old, saying that man must turn from sin to avoid punishment and turn to God to experience his mercy. But this is a message for all times and places and John spoke it with particular urgency. So a stream of people, from Jerusalem and from all over

Judea, flowed into the wilderness of John to hear him preach.

Why did John attract so many men and women? Sure, he blasted Herod and the religious leaders, a daring act that fascinated the common people. But he had strong words for them as well: they too were sinners and needed to repent. And when they confessed their sins, he baptized them in the Jordan River. Hence, John the Baptist captivated them because they understood the message of true repentance he was trying to convey. A repentance that was more than just confession of sin—in itself a long step forward and a beautiful one indeed! But repentance based on the belief that only God can both forgive and erase, both settle the debt and clear away the debris of my soul, straighten up my crooked moral ways.

«Do not waste this time of mercy offered by God», Saint Gregory the Great says. Do not waste this time of embracing the purifying love offered to us, we can say to ourselves as the time of Advent unfolds before us.

Are we ready to straighten the paths for our Lord this Advent? Could I make this the time for a truer, more searching confession in my life? John called for sincerity—sincerity with oneself—and abandonment to God's mercy. In doing so he helped people to live for God, to understand that living is a matter of fighting to open up the paths of virtue and letting God's grace vivify their soul with his joy.