

## HOMILY

### *The Second Sunday of Advent* December 7, 2008

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His name was John. People knew him locally as The Baptist. Some would say of him that he was a religious fanatic. Others, less kind, would dismiss him simply as being a flake. He just doesn't seem to fit in with shepherds and Wise Men and the other characters that we traditionally associate with the Christmas story. Yet, this was God's unlikely servant chosen to herald the spectacular events that would soon follow. Basically, John understood that God was about to do something that would shake the foundations of the earth and he needed to prepare for that event.

First, John the Baptist prepared the way by living a Godly life. In an age where corruption was rampant, John the Baptist appeared as a breath of fresh mountain air. As he passionately embraced goodness, he fearlessly spoke out against every form of corruption. John's take on life was uncompromising and complete, and the impact of his Godliness prepared the way for Jesus.

The world has no answer to the Godly life.

Some years ago a communist newspaper reporter was conducting an in-depth study of a Roman Catholic group of nuns working in Paris. The atheistic reporter was convinced that the good works and the apparent tenderness of the sisters were just a cover up for obtaining financial support for their institution. He asked if he might accompany one of the nuns during a typical day. She took him down some of the most dilapidated streets he had ever seen. In the basement of one house was a man who was terminally ill. The dirt and the smell were overwhelming. The sick man, who was lying on a bundle of rags, was indescribably dirty. He was trembling; his condition was the product of poverty, disease, alcohol and drugs. The nun rolled up her sleeves, picked up a bowl, filled it with water from a tap upstairs, and began to wash him. Suddenly the sick man jerked up. "Sister," he whimpered, "I am frightened." The communist reporter said, "I stared in disbelief as I saw this

refined, cultured woman take this filthy wreck of a man and hold him in her arms like a baby.” Suddenly the hovel became heaven because love was there. The reporter was overwhelmed by the goodness he saw.

The world has no answer to the Godly life. The only appropriate answer is to try and find the secret of it, imitate it, and hope others will come to know it themselves. That’s how John prepared. He lived a Godly life.

Let me ask you: Is God preparing the way this Advent through the Godly influence of your life?

John also prepared the way by challenging the people’s sins. One of the marks of our age is the absence of guilt. Not many people would deny that fact. The absence of guilt in today’s society makes it very difficult to talk about sin and the need for repentance. If there is no feeling of guilt, the need for repentance is greatly minimized, if not altogether eliminated.

For many, the word *repentance* is a word that belongs to yesterday. Some see repentance as something that we do only if we get caught.

Repentance is far more than simply blurting out, “I’m sorry,” if we ever get caught cheating the IRS or cheating on our spouse. Nor is repentance merely turning over a new leaf. Instead, repentance means to turn around and go in another direction. What John the Baptist wanted his audience to hear was “*turn your life toward this one called the Messiah.*” Repentance is not negative or down-faced; rather it looks up and looks forward. It breaks the chains of oppression and death that hold us back.

Don’t get stuck in the notion that repentance means feeling sorry and miserable. It means you have stopped doing what is wrong and now you are going to do the right thing.

Much is wrong with our society. We can all make a list: broken homes, the increase in violence and dishonesty, the decay of sexual morality, the growing culture of death. We need to ask ourselves what part have we played in the events

that are unfolding. Is there something we have done or something we have not done that allows these things to happen? Perhaps to get into the Christmas spirit, we need to heed the call to repentance.

This Advent we salute the forerunner who prepared the way by challenging the people's sins. He was not after the popular vote. He had eyes only for God. Are we ready to share his work and his mission?

