

## HOMILY

### *The Second Sunday of Advent*

December 7, 2008 – Year B

Father George Puraidam, MSFS

St. John the Evangelist Parish

Davison, Michigan

#### *THE VOICE IN THE WILDERNESS*

Not too many years ago, newspapers carried the story of Al Johnson, a Kansas man who repented of his sins and accepted Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior. What made his story so remarkable was the fact that as a result of his newfound faith in Christ, he confessed to a bank robbery he had participated in when he was nineteen years old. Because of the statute of limitations, Johnson could not be prosecuted for the offense. But because of his complete and total change of heart, he not only confessed his crime but also voluntarily repaid his share of the stolen money! That's repentance—*Metanoia*—the radical, unconditional change of heart demanded by John the Baptist in today's gospel.

Most human beings are born with a Ptolemaic view of the universe. Everything and everyone seems to revolve around self. A child sees himself/herself as the center of the universe. Loving parents, relatives, family and friends, all seem to revolve around him/her. We grownups, too, tend to think in terms of my wants, my needs, my opinions, and my future. It takes time to mature out of this attitude and realize that there are also others in the universe as precious as and even more precious than we are. This is the self-centered focus of the world.

Our faith tradition today invites us to change this focus in life. It asks to shift the focus *from self to God*. John the Baptist is giving voice to that shift that we need to accomplish. John's experience is verbalized in the sentence: "*One who is mightier than I is coming after me. I am not worthy to stoop and loosen the thongs of his sandals.*" He tells us to focus on *the one who is coming after him*. As we move into the second week of Advent, the voice in the wilderness beckons us to look away from ourselves and focus our attention on God.

Is there any better place than wilderness to do that? No wonder “wilderness experience” has such a prominent role in the history of salvation.

Moses needed the wilderness experience of tending his father-in-law Jethro’s sheep, to be molded as the God-filled man to lead the people of Israel to the Promised Land. It was in the wilderness that he met God face to face for the first time in the burning bush. That changed his whole life.

The people of Israel who came out of the land of Egypt had to have forty years of wandering in the wilderness/desert to be molded into the Chosen People—a God-filled people.

The Prophet Elijah spent forty days and nights in the desert for his God experience. Other prophets, too, went into the wilderness. John begins his ministry in the wilderness! Before he began his ministry, he sought the experience of the wilderness by his austere life in the desert, eating only roots, locusts and wild honey. It is that wilderness experience which enabled him to say, *“I am not worthy to stoop and loosen the thongs of his sandals.”*

The Babylonian exile was a wilderness experience for the people of Israel. In today’s first reading, the Prophet Isaiah tells the exiles the glad tidings of Yahweh’s forgiveness and mercy because of their experience in exile.

*“Comfort, give comfort to my people,  
says your God.  
Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to  
her  
that her service (slavery) is at an end,  
her guilt is expiated;  
Indeed she has received from the hand of  
the LORD  
double for all her sins.”*

Jesus, too, went into the wilderness to experience its pangs before he began his public ministry! Without this wilderness experience, God could not have come into the lives and mission of those prophets and great men so powerfully.

*The wilderness experience of brokenness and barrenness  
precedes real God experience.*

For you and me:

It may be a family struggle.

It may be a child who gives you a constant headache.

It may be your teenagers who give you that experience.

It may be the uncertainty in the auto industry.

It may be your health or your spouse's health.

It may be the spouse who wants a divorce after fifteen or twenty years of marriage.

It may be anything that comes as a cross to us!

Along with such experience comes the VOICE! To be able to listen to the “voice,” we should have experienced the wilderness—its emptiness—intensely.

How true it is:

When we have plenty,  
we cannot understand the pangs of poverty.

When we are full of ourselves,  
we fail to want God in our lives.

When we are centered on us,  
we cannot be centered on God.

St. Augustine wrote: “The confession of evil works first is the beginning of good works.” It is only when I say, “I am a sinner,” that Jesus can say, “I am your Savior. I forgive you.”

The voice in the wilderness is a voice that is very powerful, because it resounds in that empty space of our being, which no longer has mufflers and silencers, like pride, possessions, and power. It can echo and re-echo from wall to wall in our hearts without the hills of our own pride blocking it or the valleys of our possessions downing it, without our ups and downs of life swallowing it.

*The voice in the wilderness can truly call us to conversion. John's call for repentance is but a natural outcome of his personal experience.* In the season of Advent, the Church invites you and me to unconditionally acknowledge and accept our barrenness, our emptiness, our sinfulness in the sacrament of reconciliation. It has one singular purpose—of meeting the Lord when he comes at Christmas and at the end of our lives.

We have to unconditionally accept that we are lost in wilderness. But what do we do? Don't we still have the habit of saying in confession, "I did this or that because..." That "because" is a justification of our wilderness not an acceptance of it in humility like John the Baptist.

The Lord can fill only our emptiness, not our fullness, with his salvation. Let us pray that God may grant us this wilderness experience so that we can experience the salvation, the good news of the Lord, in these days of the Advent season.

Amen!

- Reading I:** Isaiah 40:1-5, 9-11. "A voice cries out: In the desert prepare the way of the Lord!"
- Reading II:** 2 Peter 3:8-14. The Lord does not delay his promise as some regard "delay" but He is patient with you!
- Gospel:** Mark 1:1-8. "A voice of one crying in the desert: "Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths.""