

Homily 2nd Sunday Advent Year B 2023

Jesus had a very special love for John the Baptist as he says in the gospel *“No man born of woman is greater than John Baptist.”* Not because he was Jesus’ cousin but because of who John was. John spoke to the people of the coming of the Messiah and had come out of the desert to do this.

It was in the desert that Moses encountered God and then led the people from slavery in Egypt through the desert until they were moulded into a people with a common identity and a common faith. We also know that Jesus prefaced his ministry by going into the desert for a month to be challenged by God to prove his worthiness and show his courage for the journey he faced ahead.

Because of commitments and responsibilities many do not have the luxury or are unable to escape into a desert for a length of time to be alone with God and yet Advent is the time we are asked to seek and make opportunities for prayer and reflection in a more intense fashion so as to allow God to enter more fully into our lives and be challenged in how we live our faith.

The call to repentance we are told time and again is about changing the way we live our lives to declutter, to develop new ways of finding how God is present and how we respond to that divine presence.

Charles Kingsley (1819-1875) writes the following which could apply equally to John the Baptist and to each of you here this morning.

One good person - one person who does not put on Sunday clothes once a week but wears those clothes for his working clothes and lets the thought of God grow in him and through him, until everything he says and does becomes religious (a grace from God); that person is worth of a thousand homilies. That person is a living gospel (Good News) and is an image of God. And everyone encountered sees their good works and admires them in spite of themselves and see that they are Godlike, and that God’s grace is not a dream, that the Holy Spirit still lives among us, and that all nobleness and human dignity are God’s gifts to us, God’s stamp, God’s picture; and so they are given a glimpse of God again in God’s saints and heroes, and glorify God the Father who is in heaven.

In Celtic spirituality there is a fundamental belief that the graces of God flow through each of us into the people around us, wherever we encounter them, whenever we pray or think of them. These graces flow through us in a never-ending stream. John the Baptist must have looked like a wild man, a hippie, an out-of-place person in society. Yet people streamed to him. He performed no miracles yet they came to be baptised and were attracted by his challenge to repent. They saw him as a prophet and it had been such a long time since a prophet had come to them that they thought God had forsaken them. John the Baptist reminded them that God still loved them as much as God ever did.

John the Baptist sets his disciples in Jesus's footsteps. He is not interested in having a following for himself, but he bears witness and then takes a step back, so that many would have the joy of meeting Jesus. Then, having accomplished his mission, John knows how to step aside. He withdraws from the scene to make way for Jesus.”

In this way, St. John the Baptist teaches “freedom from attachments” and “gratuitousness, taking care of others without benefit for oneself,” Pope Francis.

We are called to prepare the way for Jesus by preparing a way for Jesus within us first.

Repentance..

A man woke up in the morning deeply repentant after a bitter fight with his wife the previous night. He noticed with dismay the crate of beer bottles that had caused the fight.

He took it outside and started smashing the empty bottles one by one onto the wall.
He smashed the first bottle swearing, *"you are the reason I fight with my wife"*.
He smashed the second bottle, *"you are the reason I don't love my children"*.
He smashed the third bottle, *"you are the reason I don't have a decent job"*.
When he took the fourth bottle, he realized that the bottle was still sealed and was full. He hesitated for only a moment and said *"you stand aside, I know you were not involved"*.