

Homily based on the readings from December 7, 2025 (Isaiah 11.1-10;
Romans 15.4-9; Matthew 3.1-12)

For good or ill, most of us have never met anybody who is *anything* like John the Baptist. Based on what we know from Scripture, the best way to describe him is as a *force of nature*. He understood God's truth and recognized his own mission – but viewed everything else as being totally irrelevant. He did not care what he wore; he did not care what he ate; and he *certainly* did not care what anyone else thought of him. When he spoke, he had absolutely no filter – and no regard for the consequences of speaking his mind. He did not hesitate to denounce the illicit marriage of King Herod and Queen Herodias – an action that would ultimately cost him his life. In today's Gospel, he condemns the religious establishment of his day – the Pharisees and the Sadducees – in the strongest terms imaginable, referring to them as a “brood of vipers.” With John the Baptist, there was no courtesy, no deference, no timidity – just a clear, uncompromising vision of right and wrong.

If we are being honest, most of us would do well to be a bit more like John the Baptist. We have been thoroughly conditioned, almost from birth, to avoid directly confronting the evils of our society – to “go along to get along,” as the saying goes. Although we should never abandon the virtues of prudence and kindness, we must remember that failure to speak the truth is *itself* a form a cruelty. If we do not share the Good News of Jesus Christ with the people around us, who else is going to do it? From a spiritual perspective, the secular world is a barren wasteland – and *all* of us are called to be voices “crying out in the desert.”

When we look *deeper* within ourselves, though, it becomes apparent that each of us also needs at least *one* John the Baptist in our *own* lives – somebody who is willing to challenge us with the difficult truths we are not eager to hear. Some people would call that the definition of a true friend. In fact, the Book of Proverbs tells us that “[f]aithful are the wounds of a friend; profuse are the kisses of an enemy” (27.6). In my own life, I can identify a handful of instances when a courageous, plain-spoken individual has taken me to task for something I was doing wrong

– for example, a ninety-year-old religious sister telling me, with a smile *beaming* across her face, that I was *gravely* injuring myself by remaining a Protestant and that I needed to embrace the fullness of the Catholic faith. While these sorts of interactions are not particularly enjoyable in the moment, they have done *more* for me on a *spiritual* level than all the polite and respectful conversations I have ever had.

As important as it is for us to speak truthfully to each other, it is absolutely essential that we be honest with *ourselves*. In the end, *we* are the only people – apart from God himself – who can fully understand *what* we have done and *why* we have done it. When we try to excuse or minimize our own failures – as all of us are inclined to do – we are only damaging ourselves further. We cannot accept God’s *healing* if we refuse to acknowledge the *disease* that is afflicting us.

From an historical perspective, this is exactly why John the Baptist was the immediate forerunner to Jesus Christ. *Preparing the way of the Lord* means making ourselves ready to receive him – by taking responsibility

for our own sins and shortcomings. Just as John was calling the people of Israel to repentance – the young and the old, the rich and the poor, the weak and the powerful – he is also calling all of *us* to recognize and repair our own faults. This is not a process we can undertake on our own, but our *willing* and *active* participation is *indispensable*. Each of us must search our own hearts – examine our own consciences – to tear down the barriers *we* have set up to try to keep Christ away.

As we move further into the season of Advent, we must remember that we are both commemorating an historical event – the Incarnation of Jesus Christ – and also looking forward to the future – to his triumphant return, when “[h]e will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead.” As mortal men and women, there is nothing we can do to hasten or delay Christ’s arrival – we are only responsible for *ourselves*. Our task is simply to proclaim – and to heed – the message of John the Baptist: “Repent ... *Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths.*” We have no idea *on which day our Lord will come*, but we do

know – with absolute certainty – what each of us needs to do to be ready.