

Be ready; expect Jesus!

Point out the icon of John the Baptism as the person being lifted up to help us prepare for the coming of the Lord.

(Explain the beginning of the Gospel of Luke : Roman civil leaders, Jewish leaders, religious leaders, John as a son of a priest who spends time in the desert. Explain how Luke has the same kind of introduction of the birth of Jesus as he does of John, the Baptist.)

Key point: John is an insignificant person in an out-of-the-way place.

Have the community repeat: an insignificant person in an out-of-the-way place

How many hours have we been spent looking at TV taking in the bombings in Paris and now in California hoping for some good news but finding none. Where shall we look? We need to look within ourselves. An insignificant person in an out-of-the-way place

Like John, the Baptist, we need to stop. We need to ponder. We need to hear the voice in our deserts crying out, prepare the way of the Lord!

I offer you a quote from St. Anselm which should focus the activities of our Advent season:

Insignificant one, escape from your everyday business for a short while, hide for a moment from your restless thoughts. Break off from your cares and troubles and be less concerned about your tasks and labors. Make a little time for God and rest a while in him.

Enter into our mind's inner chamber. Shut out everything but God and whatever helps you to seek him; and when you have shut the door, look for him. Speak now to God and say with your whole heart: I seek your face/// your face, Lord I desire.

My brothers and sisters, BE READY! EXPECT JESUS!

What does John invite us to do this Advent season? He invites us to do two things: First, he invites us to go out into the desert with him, a desert of prayer so that we can meet our God.

(Tell the story of Fudge telling Martell to keep on praying.)

Two simple suggestions how we can “keep praying” this season

- **LITTLE BLUE BOOK**
- **READINGS OF THE DAY**

Remember those to whom does the Lord comes: He comes to insignificant persons in out of the way places, places where we can enter into prayer with him.

The second way John the Baptist invites us to ready ourselves for Jesus is to experience a baptism for the forgiveness of sins. They came to John to be baptized and have their sins forgiven.

We may ask ourselves, “Why is this forgiveness of sins so necessary to prepare for the coming of the Lord? What does forgiveness of sins have to do with preparing the coming of the Lord in our lives?”

Have you ever let your minds [naturally] wander we begin to think of who has harmed us and those whom we have harmed. We are trapped by our unconscious thinking which can be very self-destructive. The harm done to us is like a deep valley which blocks the glory of God coming into our lives because we are deeply wounded by life We become the victims, the wounded ones, the ones trapped. We

try to escape our pain through addictions, too much eating or drinking or drugs or inappropriate sexual expression. Our addictions block us from letting the goodness of God come into our lives.

At times our response to our being hurt, is to strike out at others.

Hurt others before they hurt us. Our sinful aggressive actions create become high mountains which divide us from God. Because we have these deep valleys of hurt and high mountains of sinfulness, we block the path which Jesus needs to travel to come to us.

We need to level the valleys of self-destructive addictions and knock down our violence towards others. For we, my brothers and sisters, are called to build a highway for the coming of the Lord.

That is why John the Baptist calls us who are preparing for the Lord's coming this Advent season to experience a "baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins".

For us Catholics, a key way to experience forgiveness of sins is celebrating the sacrament of reconciliation ... going to confession. For what happens when we confess our sins and place ourselves in the hands of a merciful Lord?

Then the mountains of our guilt will be laid low, and the valleys of our hurts will be filled in. Then we will begin once again to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world we are called to be. We will possess the joy and hope which comes from encountering the mercy of the living God.

That is why in Advent of each year we have special communal penance services.

(Explain the request of one of the parents of the children preparing to receive the sacrament of reconciliation who is not Catholic but would like to experience forgiveness.)

Some may ask, why do we need to confess our sins to a man. Cannot we simply do it directly to God? Sure God can. God can forgive us any way he wishes. But we have a special assurance from Christ that we receive forgiveness in the sacrament of reconciliation.

In John 22:22. In the scene after his resurrection Jesus appeared to his disciples, breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them." Jesus assures us of God's forgiveness through the leaders of his community.

Maybe many of us have not gone to confession for a long time. Just ask the priest to lead you through. The form is quite easy. What is more difficult is the decision to face the traps of self-destruction and the mountains (sometimes repeated little hills) of ways we have wronged others, sometimes of substantial size that has blocked God's coming into our lives.

John the Baptist simply, a prophet of God in our midst, a man proclaiming the coming of the savior into our lives. His message is very clear.

Make ready the way of the Lord:

- O insignificant ones, in the midst of all that is happening in our world and our lives, take time, even if it is just a few minutes each day, to welcome the Lord this Advent season**
- O chosen ones, in the midst of all our turmoil, take time to experience the forgiveness of sin so that nothing rising us from our unconscious selves can block us from announcing to the world in word and deed the coming of the reign of God.**

My brothers and sisters: GET READY! GET READY! EXPECT JESUS!