

A Lectio Divina Reading of Mark's Gospel

December 4, 2011

In this Advent Season, let's take a moment and better prepare ourselves for Christmas with a little more prayer.

I invite you to relax and make yourselves comfortable.

Put your feet on the floor...rest your arms and hands...close your eyes if you feel the need to...and get rid of all distracting thoughts in your mind.

Relax...breath slowly...and listen.

“The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.”

- There's no question about what we are getting ready hear. It's crystal clear. We are starting in the very beginning and are about to hear the gospel...the Good News...the life, preaching, and saving ministry of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. We will hear all about the significant events of how Jesus acted in our midst and how our salvation was won for us by God Himself.
- Can we remember when we first heard the Good News of Jesus Christ? When did we first experience Christ's gospel – namely, his salvation – in our lives?

“As it is written in Isaiah the Prophet: ‘Behold, I am sending my messenger ahead of you; he will prepare your way. A voice of one crying in the desert: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths.’”

- The stage is further set. We get a better idea of what we are about to dive into, namely, a messenger whose job it is to prepare people. And he prepares them by helping them properly order their “way” – their manner of being, their character, their very soul. And why are they preparing themselves? Because someone important is coming...the Lord! And all people have to be ready to properly receive Him without any hindrances.

- What voices in our own lives have helped us prepare our way...our soul? How might the Lord be calling us to do the same – to prepare the way – for a friend, a family member, a neighbor?

“John the Baptist appeared in the desert proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.”

- So, here’s our messenger – John the Baptist – living in a desert preaching about baptism and repentance. Why was he living in the desert? Why is a desert experience so prevalent in the season of Advent? John, in the depths of his heart, desired to find the Christ, the Messiah. He eliminated all distractions in his life and all that would keep him from total and complete fulfillment, which he believed existed and rested in Jesus Christ, the Son of God alone.
- He preached about baptism and repentance. He preached about salvation and what’s needed for salvation, namely, a change – a change of heart, a change of attitude, a change of orientation so that our gaze is fixed solely on God. This change is an invitation to be transformed, a transformation that God desires for us and brings about within us so that we may receive salvation.
- In what ways is the Lord calling us to retreat to a desert in our own lives so that we may experience Jesus Christ? In what ways are we being called to change so as to receive the salvation that God promises us?

“People of the whole Judean countryside and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the Jordan River as they acknowledged their sins. John was clothed in camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist. He fed on locusts and wild honey.”

- There was something special about John, something exceptional that seemed to attract people from all around. Perhaps it was his clothing or his diet or maybe, it was simply the fact that he was preaching the Truth of Jesus Christ. People became interested in this and wanted to know more.
- How have we found ourselves hungry for the Truth? In what ways did we seek out the Truth so that we might fully possess it?

“And this is what he proclaimed: ‘One mightier than I is coming after me. I am not worthy to stoop and loosen the thongs of his sandals.’”

- Now, the plot thickens. John, the messenger, is not only preaching about baptism and repentance, but there’s more! He introduces us to the fact that someone else is coming after him...someone mightier and more important. And this is why it was necessary that he preached about salvation and encouraged change in our lives so that we might be able to receive salvation...so that we might be able to receive the Lord into our hearts.
- John, humble man that he is, can’t help to think that he’s not even fit to unfasten the sandal straps of the Lord...much less lay his hand upon his venerable head in baptism. But, in obedience, John does so out of love
- How might the Lord be calling us to lower ourselves in His presence? Are we willing to humbly obey the Lord’s command in our own lives?

“I have baptized you with water; he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”

- John completes his message now and fulfills his role, namely, to shift all the focus off of himself and onto Jesus Christ, the Son of God, whose baptism with the Holy Spirit surpasses any and all other baptisms. This special and supernatural baptism also comes with a unique gift in that the recipients, namely us, receive the grace to be called God’s children and thus, receive a share in His divinity.
- How faithful have we been to our baptism as a child of God? How have we nurtured this in one another?