

2nd Sunday of Advent (A)
December 5, 2010

You gotta love John the Baptist.

He tells it like it is – no holding back, no pulling punches, laying it all out there.

He's genuine, authentic, not afraid to speak his mind & cause a little bit of a stir.

He's a no-nonsense kind of guy who commands respect and attention whenever he speaks.

I mean, here he is, drawing people to himself to the Jordan River to baptize them with water while preaching and calling these same people to: "REPENT for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!"

In other words, he's calling people to: shape up, change, and leave behind their wicked ways that pull them away from God's love and friendship.

This is no insignificant message that he's talking about...yet, hundreds if not thousands of people are drawn to him and ask him to baptize them in the Jordan River.

Among these people are Pharisees and Sadducees – people who we know by now, did not believe in the resurrection of the body nor the existence of the soul that was created by God and meant for eternal life.

We also know that these people – Pharisees and Sadducees – were powerful people who came from rich families. Thus, they were influential and prominent people in their society.

This doesn't faze John though, who doesn't hesitate to call them out: "You brood of vipers!"

In other words, "You low life! You scum! You snakes!"

John obviously is not concerned with what these Pharisees and Sadducees could do to him.

Rather, he's more interested and committed to preaching the Truth and helping people prepare themselves for the coming of the kingdom – and rightfully so. After all, this was his purpose and mission in life.

From the time he was in his mother, Elizabeth's, womb he was announcing the arrival and presence of Jesus, the Christ, the Savior, the Messiah. He did so when he "leapt for joy" when Mary, who was pregnant with Jesus, came to visit her cousin Elizabeth, who was pregnant with John.

After John gets done admonishing the Pharisees and Sadducees a bit, he dares them to prove their repentance – he dares them to walk the walk and not just talk the talk.

In other words, he says, "Show me, show everyone here, and show God that you are sincere. Do penance, change your ways, your attitude, and your behavior. Stand up for God and all that He has revealed, especially through His Son, the Messiah. And by the way, just because you claim to be God's chosen people and have Abraham as your father in faith, don't think that this is enough...because it's not!"

Wow, John doesn't hold anything back, does he?

That's why I love him and respect his character so much.

At the same time though, his message is a little hard to swallow and follow.

I mean, John is challenging not only the Pharisees and Sadducees, but us too and calling us to prove our repentance and faith in the Lord God.

He's also telling us that just because we consider ourselves Christians doesn't mean we will automatically get into the kingdom of heaven.

We are called to back this claim up with the proper actions and behavior.

We are called, in a sense, to put our money where our mouth is, to put our treasures where our heart is, to give evidence of our repentance and faith by our thoughts, words, actions, and behavior.

As we do so, I think it's important to keep in mind that we don't need to perform great and mighty acts though.

St. Theresa of Lisieux said, "We don't need to do great actions...only small actions with great love."

And so, as we reflect on this and our lives, are we:

- Reaching out to the marginalized and lowly by praying for them, writing them letters / cards, visiting them, doing some act / gesture of love and compassion?
- Practicing humility by giving another the attention and compliments that he/she deserves?
- Trying to grow in patience and understanding by letting someone else go in front of us in line?
- Spending more time in prayer outside of Church?
- Trying to be more open to others' opinions, personalities, and gifts rather than focusing on their annoying habits?

As we reflect on these and other ways to prove our repentance and faith in the Lord, may we pray for the grace to accept the challenges to prepare ourselves for the coming of the kingdom of heaven – no matter what this may entail.