

Actions Define Identity
December 11, 2011

I can't help but think that John the Baptist might not be all there...that there might be a few marbles missing.

I mean the priests and Levites ask him, "Who are you?" which seems like a very simple question, but John responds, "I am not the Christ."

What?! They didn't ask who he wasn't, they asked who he was.

Unsatisfied with this answer, they prod and poke a little more and ask, "Are you Elijah?" at which he responds, "I am not."

Then they ask, "Are you the Prophet?" and he says, "No."

At this point, I imagine the priests and Levites are getting a little impatient and maybe even a little frustrated with John's cloudy responses. So, they finally say, "Ok...so, who are you then? We need to know because those who sent us are expecting an answer and you're not giving it. Who are you?!"

Still, John doesn't give them a clear answer...he never says, "Alright, you caught me. I'm John, son of Elizabeth and Zachariah."

Rather, he says, "I am the voice of one crying out in the desert, 'make straight the way of the Lord.'"

Once again, I can only imagine the frustration of the priests and Levites here. They must have been so upset that they brought in a third party to try to get a clear response from John...the Pharisees. So, now we have 3 significant groups of people trying to get a clear, concise answer from John regarding who he is. Nonetheless, John is persistent and stands his ground.

Further, he does tell them who he is...he identifies himself by his actions...by his testimony...by his witnessing to Christ.

This is what defines him – what he does and what he was sent to do; namely, proclaim the coming of Christ and thus, prepare the people to receive the Lord.

His actions define his identity and this is further illustrated by his baptizing with water...an act that reminds people that welcoming the Lord requires: acknowledgment of sins, repenting, and receiving forgiveness.

So, John is all about revealing who he is...he just does so through his actions and if the priests, Levites, and Pharisees would see this, they might come to know who he is.

I can remember when I first heard the story of St. Maximilian Kolbe.

I was in seminary, my first year I believe, and still learning about what it means to be a priest.

Then, my professor told me the story of a man in a Nazi Concentration Camp who volunteered to take another man's place who was about to be killed.

The man about to be killed had a wife and children.

When the soldiers asked the man who volunteered to take the husband's and father's place who he thought he was taking another's place, the man – Maximilian Kolbe – responded, "I am a Catholic priest."

I think that's when I began to realize that priesthood is defined by actions and that it truly does mean laying down your life for another.

So, as we look at our own lives and our identity as Catholic Christians, what actions are particular to us and help define us as such?

What do we do that communicates to others that we believe and follow Jesus Christ, our Savior?

Let's take this one more step...

What are we doing this Advent Season to prepare ourselves to welcome the Lord, the light of Christ into our hearts?

How are we conditioning our hearts, minds, bodies, souls...our entire being?

What actions are we taking this season that says to others: I'm giving my all and holding nothing back so that I may receive the light of Christ completely and fully?

I think this goes beyond simply decorating the Christmas tree and putting up Christmas lights. This goes beyond buying and wrapping presents. This goes beyond preparing Christmas cookies and feasts.

What this means exactly is what we have to figure out I think. And thank God we have 2 more weeks of Advent to spend in prayer and preparation.

But, as we all know, this can be a challenge and often overlooked and forgotten.

So, in the midst of doing all the stuff to get ready for Christmas and party after party, let's be careful not to fall into the hustle and bustle of the season that our culture emphasizes.

Rather, let's remember to take a little time and give some attention to preparing our spirit, soul, and body so that we may rejoice in what truly matters: in God our Savior!