

Each year, in this Second Sunday of Advent church focusses on John the Baptist and his preaching. This year also we heard him shouting in the wilderness about the coming of the Messiah. He said, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!"

The prophet Isaiah had foretold this long ago when he wrote, "*A voice of one crying out in the desert, Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths*".

Now hearing him, people from Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region along the Jordan were coming to him. Among the crowd there were leaders like Pharisees and Sadducees, common men and women, soldiers, tax collectors, men and women of all sections of society. John was preparing them to receive Jesus. And finally, when Jesus appeared, John the Baptist pointed out to him saying, "This is the lamb of God who takes away sins of the world."

Today's Gospel gives us a graphic and colorful picture of John the Baptist. He is preaching in the desert wearing camel's hair and a leather belt. His food is desert food, locusts and wild honey. He does not have anything sophisticated in his desert life. Yet this man, living a primitive lifestyle, lacking proper food and clothes, has become an attraction and a magnet. Why? Why as we heard in the Gospel that the whole of the Judean countryside and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem were going out to John in the desert? Nothing like this had ever before happened. Previously if you wanted to meet God you went to the temple in Jerusalem. Now those in Jerusalem literally turned their backs to the temple and went out into the desert to John. He was preparing for Jesus who would replace the temple as the way to the Father.

A second strange thing is that they were all being baptized by John. Previously, only those converting to Judaism and becoming Jews were baptized. Now the whole Judean countryside and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem were being baptized by John for forgiveness of their sins. This also shows there is something new occurring and an old way of life is being left behind. Who is coming? John the Baptist prepared the whole of Judea and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem to receive Jesus.

During Advent, the Church, like John the Baptist, encourages us to prepare for Jesus. The whole of Judea and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem had to free up time in their lives to go to the desert to meet John the Baptist and be baptized. Like them, we can only prepare properly for Jesus by freeing up time in our lives to spend time with Jesus.

Today's Gospel reminds about our greatest obligation of pointing out Jesus to other people. Many keep away from doing this, partly from shyness, partly from indolence, partly because they think that it is the business of priests and nuns.

Because we have all received the baptism of Jesus, we all share in his three-fold mission- as prophet, priest, and king. Unfortunately, most of the us have outsourced or sub-delegated our mission. We have out sourced our prophetic mission to media our priestly duties to ordained priests and religious and our kingly mission to the politicians.

Now we are sitting in the gallery watching the game. When the politicians mess up things, we cry foul, when the priests and bishops fumble, we grumble and some even stop coming to the church. When the media gets corrupt and fails to challenge the wrong doers we complain.

None of us are called to be mere spectators in the gallery of life. Each and every one of us has specific and unique roles to play in our lives. We are called to make straight our twisted ways to a highway for our God! There are many valleys to be filled in; there are many mountains and hills that are to be leveled; the rugged lands to be made plain; and rough countries to be brought to harmony.

Just as John the Baptist pointed to Christ through his preaching, we also need to point others to Christ through our lives. These others could be in our own families among our own relatives. With our true Christian life, we can point Christ to others.

Today, we need many modern-day John the Baptists who can point Jesus Christ to others by dedicating their lives as priests and nuns. May be for today's shortage of vocations we are also responsible? At least to some degree?