

SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT HOMILY YEAR MATTHEW

1. John the Baptist must have been a strange and powerful character
 - a. Imagine walking out into the desert to see a man preaching and baptizing
 - b. A man wearing camel's hair clothing, who eats locusts and wild honey
 - c. He is not simply putting on a show, that one would go out to see
 - d. He confronts the people coming to him
 - e. Tells the people it is time to change the direction of your life
 - f. Time is short, one much more powerful than I is coming
 - g. How direct he can be is his challenge to the Pharisees and Sadducees although opposite of each other
 - i. These are the two most influential groups in the faith of the Jews at that time
 1. Sadducees were the priests, controlled temple worship
 2. Anyone who lived in Israel would come to the temple at least once or twice a year, to offer sacrifice and be made right with God
 3. Pharisees were the teachers, holy men who kept law strictly and would teach in the synagogues
 4. Eventually became the rabbis after destruction of temple
 - ii. John says to these people probably expecting honors
 1. Why are you here? Did someone warn you that you are not as holy as you think yourselves
 2. Even your claim of being children of Abraham means nothing, God can raise up children from these stones
 3. God is sending another who will cleanse you with fire and with water
2. With these powerful words John warning us not to get too comfortable with our faith
 - a. Pharisees and Sadducees thought they had figured out God
 - i. Sadducees by offering sacrifice regularly in temple they were good enough
 - ii. Pharisees by studying and following law strictly they giving honor to God
 - b. By the standards of their country these were the most highly respected people
 - c. John and Jesus both challenge them, they are putting God in a box
 - i. Once I figure out God, I can give him so much time and energy
 - ii. Get back to what is important to me
3. John and Jesus are telling us quit trying to be in control and thus worrying about life
 - a. Telling to let go and let the power of the Holy Spirit transform us
 - i. Are our lives bearing good fruit, giving glory to God, rejoicing in His love

4. The fruit that John the Baptist is challenging us to bear is described by St. Paul and Isaiah
 - a. Paul says listen to the Word of God, find endurance and encouragement.
 - b. He prays that through this endurance and encouragement we might welcome each other and live in harmony with each other
 - c. The ideal of this harmony is that the wolf will be guest of the lamb, the calf and the young lion will lie down together
 - d. Looking at the world and failures of institutions around us this can seem to be a nice dream,
5. The scriptures are telling us it does not have to be a dream
 - a. But this means that we take God's word seriously
 - b. John says repent, turn away from the path of selfishness and individualism where I must be first
 - i. Christian Harmony involves being able to love even the most disagreeable person, seeing a goodness in him or her
 - ii. Harmony is being able to show mercy even to our enemy
 - iii. World and Satan whisper in our inner ear
 1. Trying to live this kind of harmony is foolish, we will look like weak losers
 - iv. Our hope is that we are not alone in trying to create this world of peace
 - c. John promises that Jesus baptizes us with the Holy Spirit and fire
 - i. Through baptism and the Eucharist Jesus has changed us if we open our eyes to him
 - ii. We have within us that power to transform the world
 - iii. Do this not in one grand swoop rather in the nitty-gritty of the day
 - iv. We start with our families, our neighbors forgiving any offense they have done to us
 - v. We reach out to the poor to the most vulnerable in the world.
 - vi. Rather than seeing the world as divided in some way between them and us
 - vii. We celebrate with anyone willing that God has made us one in Christ
 - viii. We celebrate this unity giving praise and glory to God today and every day in the Eucharist