

Greetings to you! The theme for our morning's meditation is 'the message of John the Baptist'. In the gospel reading Mark quotes the prophet Isaiah saying, 'I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way- a voice of one calling in the wilderness, "Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him."' In the original context the reference is to the Syrian Desert which needed to be leveled for the Babylonian exiles to come back to their country. However, Mark reads it as 'a voice of one calling in the desert, "prepare the way".' By doing this Mark makes it a referent to John the Baptist who was out in the wilderness preparing the way for the coming of Jesus. John appeared baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. John's message was one of repentance in the face of divine judgment. His object was to restore the people of God from a broken relationship. Baptism was a symbol of repentance and of belonging to the true remnant of the people of God. John was calling for a single initiatory baptism indicating the beginning of a new commitment. This baptism was most likely the ritual cleansing that Gentile converts had to undergo but the shocking thing about this is that John is asking the Jews to undergo the same initiatory ritual required by the Gentile converts. John was clearly showing that it was not good enough to be born a Jew, but one had to be born of water and the Spirit. The challenge of John's message is that we are called to leave our evil ways behind, to repent, to turn around and to turn to Christ.

A second message about John is that of his humility. John said, 'after me comes the one more powerful than I, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.' John's message of humility is again the challenge for each one of us. In a world where everybody wants to be famous and popular, and amass wealth, John's simple lifestyle challenges us. John also said that the one who comes after him will baptize people with the Holy Spirit. Jesus himself said, 'no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. Water and Spirit is a reference to the work of the Holy Spirit in cleansing and renewing us. It is the Holy Spirit who brings about spiritual regeneration in our lives. No amount of outward make over will transform our lives. Water is also a symbol of repentance as seen in the baptism of John. Paul writing to Titus says, 'he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Saviour, so that having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.'

As we come into the third week of advent, we are challenged by the prophetic word of John the Baptist. We are called to prepare the way like John the Baptist leveling the mountainous paths and filling the valleys that we may prepare people for the Lord's coming by living our life in a manner that is acceptable to the Lord. Secondly, the challenge of John to repent of our sins is addressed to each one of us. We cannot depend on our pedigree, place of birth, caste, or our education or looks because these will not take us anywhere.

John also says that we need to be baptized with God's Holy Spirit. This is available to all those who respond to the good news of Jesus Christ- no matter how bad a person you may have been -because Jesus Christ came to save sinners. So as we come closer to Christmas day. May we truly take stock of our lives in the light of God's prophetic word and realign ourselves to follow him faithfully all the days of our life.

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