

## **Homily for Dec. 12, 3rd Sunday of Advent**

**Last week we reflected on Our Blessed Mother. This week, we look at the other great biblical figure who helps us with our Advent preparations – John the Baptist.**

**Who is this John the Baptist? Who is this figure that is the subject of centuries of religious art?**

**There are many great persons in the Bible. People can talk forever on King David, Moses, Judith, Esther, or the Apostle Paul. As an example, Paul wrote many of the letters in the New Testament and is the main person we follow in the last half of the Acts of the Apostles.**

**Who is this John the Baptist? We do not have several chapters or books recounting his main accomplishments.**

**The Baptist is known only for two events. (1) He Baptized Jesus and drew everyone's attention to Him as the Christ. (2) And John was beheaded by Herod. Yet he was a giant in the eyes of the faithful back then.**

**The person and power and of John the Baptist is known, by us, less by his words than by people's regard for him. Herod and Herodias wanted him dead, and feared his popularity among the people. The people wondered if He was one of the prophets of old, Elijah who was to come before the Messiah, or perhaps the Messiah himself. Jesus said of all men born of women, none was greater than John.**

**Amidst all of this, John insists he is not in competition with Jesus, and in fact he is unworthy of Jesus.**

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**Last Sunday we read how John came in fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy. He is the voice crying out in the wilderness "Prepare the way of the Lord."**

**In the verses following that passage, John challenges the crowds.**

**“You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Produce good fruits as evidence of your repentance; and do not begin to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father,’ for I tell you, God can raise up children to Abraham from these stones.”**

**Today we hear their response. Their reaction is not one of insult or dismay at being talked to in this way.**

**Instead, they ask the question that in many ways is asked throughout the Gospel According to Luke and the Acts of the Apostles, “What should we do?”**

**And his reply is tailored to each group. To the Crowds, it is to be generous to those in need. To the Tax Collectors, it is to act with integrity. And to the Soldiers, to be grateful in the midst of the hardships of their profession, and don’t perpetuate the cycle of suffering by adding to the suffering of others through the power they wield.**

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**John’s answer to their question was in each case to suggest to them the next step in their living their faith with greater clarity and integrity.**

**This is the opposite way some people might interpret John’s answer. He is not giving the basic minimum – of which no more should be expected or required. John is NOT saying, “You can be good without God, belief, church, prayer – or having to put up with those sorts of people. All you need is to be nice, honest, and gentle.” He would not have been executed if that was his message.**

**John is getting people - who he has just identified as being worthy of being called snakes – to make their first steps on the path back to God as the Day of the Lord draws near. John definitely lived a life that demonstrated the radical nature of being ready.**

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**Perhaps living lives of repentance and cleaning up our act does not at first sound like they belong to “Gaudete Sunday” – “Rejoice Sunday.” But they are. Any preparations for the coming of a guest includes a thorough house cleaning. Any**

party includes sprucing up the home and tidying up the place. Our place is our heart and the way we live.

And the context IS Gaudete Sunday. It is the joy associated with all God has done. It is the joy connected to Jesus having come, and is coming again. As we allow ourselves to increase in our joy as the days draw near for the celebration of Christ's birth, we think again on how to prepare. And we let ourselves ask that question of John the Baptist, "What should we do?"

Then, let us ponder how he answered that question for the Crowds, the Tax Collectors, and the Soldiers. And let us ask God what directions John the Baptist would give us. "What should we do, to prepare the way of the Lord."