

December 10, 2017  
Second Sunday of Advent  
Mark 1:1-8

The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ (the Son of God). As it is written in Isaiah the prophet: "Behold, I am sending my messenger ahead of you; he will prepare your way. A voice of one crying out in the desert: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths.'"

John (the) Baptist appeared in the desert proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. People of the whole Judean countryside and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the Jordan River as they acknowledged their sins.

John was clothed in camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist. He fed on locusts and wild honey. And this is what he proclaimed: "One mightier than I is coming after me. I am not worthy to stoop and loosen the thongs of his sandals. I have baptized you with water; he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

Background:

Unlike Matthew and Luke, Mark's gospel does not begin with a genealogy. Such a genealogy would explain why this carpenter from a small town of Nazareth is worthy of a proclamation, a gospel. In Jesus' day a proclamation was about the birth of a royal son or a military victory. When Mark's first verse is "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God," the people of the day would ask, "Who is this Jesus Christ?" The phrase "son of" would be understood to mean "having the qualities of." Jesus is being proclaimed as having the qualities of God. Therefore, his birth must be proclaimed.

After the proclamation, Mark quotes the great prophet Isaiah, and he also draws on and reworks the prophet Malachi: "Lo, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me... And suddenly there will come to the temple the LORD whom you seek, and the messenger of the covenant whom you desire. Yes, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts. Lo, I will send you Elijah, the prophet, before the day of the LORD comes, the great and terrible day..." (Malachi 3:1, 23). Mark introduces John as the one who prepares for the coming of Jesus. When the people of Israel were freed from Egyptian slavery, they were first led by God into the desert before they entered the promised land. This exodus experience becomes the model of liberation and encounter with God by which the Jews understand God working in and throughout their history. Mark draws on this understanding in presenting John the Baptist, the one in the desert who was preparing the way for one who has the qualities of God.

Unlike the Essenes, who practiced a ritual of washing that was meant only for those of their community, John's baptism is for everyone. The extent to which people respond to John indicates the spiritual hunger of the people. They may have gone to see the man who was clothed in camel hair and ate locusts. But they responded to his message by being baptized and by committing to making changes in their lives. They were committing themselves to live a more faithful relationship to God. No doubt the approaching "day of the Lord," with its judgment and its time when debts would be forgiven, would have motivated some. Unlike the Essenes, who became an isolated ascetical desert community who also waited for the day of the Lord, John's message was focused on people returning to their families and their communities with a renewed dedication to their relationship with God.

Reflection Questions:

1. Who are the people who have called you to live more deeply your relationship with God?
2. What have been your experiences of being in a personal or spiritual desert or emotional desert?
3. How do you experience waiting in your life? Is the experience of waiting different now than it was ten years ago??
4. Where do you experience hope?
5. John preached repentance for the forgiveness of sins. Why was that attractive to so many people of this day?

6. Can you take some time to talk to God about your desire to have him come into your life in a fuller and more meaningful way, or about what keeps you from entering fully into that desire, or about some other aspect of your relationship with God that arises from this gospel?

The gospel background and reflection questions are written by Fr. Paul Gallagher, OFM. They are edited by Sister Anne Marie Lom, OSF and Joe Thiel. The excerpts from the Sunday readings are prepared by Joe Thiel. To be added to the distribution list, send your name and email address to [annemarie.lom@gmail.com](mailto:annemarie.lom@gmail.com)

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