

Pastor's Note

Second Sunday of Advent ~ 10 December 2017

Don't get me wrong! John the Baptist is one of my biblical heroes and my inspiration in living my priesthood. But I do not usually associate him with Christmas because I normally think of angels with their wings and halos or the shepherds visiting the manger or the wise men bearing their gifts. Certainly not John, an ascetic prophet from the desert, who feeds on a diet of locusts and who, any chance he got, reminds me that I am a sinner and need to repent.

On this Second Sunday of Advent, who really wants to hear about a man whose life doesn't have a happy ending? The first time we meet him, he is dancing in his mother's womb and the last time we hear of him it was when Salome performs a dance that steals the heart of her stepfather, Herod, who, in that drunken moment, promises everything to her. Upon the prompting of her mother, Salome asks for the head of John the Baptist on a plate. Not exactly the kind of story you'd like to hear in a Christmas or Advent carol! Whatever else we say about him, John the Baptist, is one figure you will not find hanging on most people's Christmas tree.

But more than his tragic story, it is the meaning of his life that doesn't quite seem to fit into this merry season. After years of preaching in the desert and baptising in the Jordan, John the Baptist, realising that the time of the Messiah had arrived, told his disciples to follow Jesus instead - telling them that the Messiah must increase, and he must decrease.

In this world and age, who wants to decrease? Isn't it more practical and ego fulfilling to increase, to become better and to accumulate more? And in getting things done, isn't it more effective to wield whatever authority we can wield and even throw our weight around especially when we face people who might hurt us? Who wants to make himself/herself small and defenceless in a world that can often turn hostile and dangerous?

As Christmas approaches, many of us prefer to leave John the Baptist behind in the desert and rush eagerly to the manger with all its usual angels, shepherds, and wise men. But when I think about it, what is Christmas about, is it not about the God who, in his infinite vastness, decreases Himself in order to become one of us, so that we in turn might increase and become one with Him? Isn't Christmas precisely about Jesus' transparency when he showed us what it means to remain the Way, the Truth and the Life so that we may have our salvation?

And so, on second thoughts, maybe John the Baptist is a great pre-Christmas figure, after all. As he did in life, today his life and his person both point to the life and person of Christ. Indeed, he paves the way of the Lord, which is the way of humility and self-sacrifice.

May this be our prayer this Second Sunday of our expectant waiting:

Dear Jesus, before I rush to the stable to gaze at your face, grant me the grace to linger in the desert to first learn from the Baptist. Please allow his spirit to touch my heart, for his spirit is a reflection of your own spirit of humility and self-sacrifice. Amen.

Advent Blessings
Fr Sherwin Lapaan