



- ◆ John the Baptist says to us: “Produce good fruit as evidence of your repentance.”
- ◆ Beatification of Fulton Sheen
- ◆ Catholic Television and Radio Programs
- ◆ Update on Outreach to Uganda

Every year on the second and third Sundays of Advent, we encounter the powerful figure of John the Baptist, the one chosen by God to prepare people’s hearts to receive Jesus. This week, we meet John out in the desert. Next week, we will find him in prison.

Out in the Desert: The desert was a special place in Israel’s history. Their ancestors spent 40 years in the desert. It was during that journey that Moses received the Ten Commandments. Jesus spent 40 days in the desert fasting and praying before he started his Public Ministry.

In the desert, John wore weird clothes (camel’s hair) and was on a weird diet (locusts and honey). Why the mention of these details? Because John was seen as the prophet Elijah risen from the dead. John dressed like Elijah (2Kings 1:18).

If John was living out in the desert, one wonders how the people living away from the desert knew about him? (I guess they saw him on his Facebook page! ☺.) Once people heard about John’s preaching, they went in droves to hear him. Matthew said that the *whole* region around Judea and Jerusalem went out to see him. Matthew also saw John as the fulfillment of an ancient prophecy of Isaiah.

*A voice of one crying out
in the desert:
“Prepare the way of the Lord
make straight his paths.”*

His Message: Repentance

Repentance is a rich and loaded word in the Bible. It doesn’t just mean an act of contrition for one’s sins. Bishop Robert Barron calls repentance a revolutionary word. Why? Because it calls us to a totally new mindset leading to new behaviors. St. Paul’s conversion was indeed a revolution. One day he was persecuting Christians and throwing them in jail. Shortly after that, he was running all over the place preaching on behalf of Jesus. (Later I will say more about what repentance might mean to us who say we are already followers of Christ.)

Enter the Pharisees

When the Pharisees heard that large crowds were flocking to hear John and receive his baptism of repentance, they decided to go out and see him for themselves.

“Brood of vipers.” When John saw the Pharisees, one might think he would take a moment to welcome them to his parish mission. No such luck. Instead, he attacked and badmouthed them calling them a “brood of vipers”—you evil lot! Why was John so hard on the Pharisees? He might have seen them in action prior to going out into the desert, and he didn’t like what he saw. We know when Jesus arrived on the scene, the Pharisees opposed him every step of the way.

“Produce good fruit as evidence of your repentance.” John was saying to the Pharisees: If you want to become a part of what I am doing, then you need to show me that you are sincere and truly want to repent and change.

What form of repentance would the Pharisees need to do? We know from the Gospels that they were both close-minded and hard-hearted when it came to Jesus. ‘Close-mindedness’ and ‘hard-heartedness’ are two serious sins—probably mortal sins. So for the Pharisees, the good fruit of repentance would have involved opening their minds and hearts to John and his message.

What about us? What are some examples of good fruit that we should show to prove that we are repentant of our sins and living a life of true repentance?

A key fruit we must seek to develop is an *authentic prayer life*, one that impacts the way we live our daily lives. In my book on Prayer, I state that *The Third Key to an Effective Prayer Life is Connecting Prayer to our Daily Lives*. At the beginning of that chapter is the following quote from John Shea:

*Unless the prayers we speak are tightly linked
with the lives we lead, they will be babblings
we hide behind rather than true speech which
reveals who we are in relation to all that is.*

The following are some good things that flow from an authentic prayer life.

- ◆ *A prayer life that helps us to see other people’s point of view without necessarily agreeing with that point of view.* The opposite is a closed, self-righteous mindset that prevents one from hearing God’s Word coming to us from channels we are normally closed to.
- ◆ *A prayer life that can help us to see where there is sin in our lives.* There is always a danger that despite a strong prayer life, we may be spiritually blind to many things that God wants us to see. We may think we have no reason to go to Confession.
- ◆ *A prayer life that is gradually helping us to live lives of ‘mercy and love’—as our car magnet says.* As we watch Jesus deal with people, we see him concretely

show them mercy and love. But he is stern on those who have closed their minds to him and are judgmental of others.

- ♦ *A prayer life that is leading us to be more forgiving of those who have failed us and hurt us.* We don't need to be friends with toxic people, but we must do all we can to cooperate with the grace of God to let go of all resentments and negativity that we may hold in our hearts. An authentic prayer life will also make it easier for us to apologize to others. When it is hard for us to say "I am sorry," it is a sign that the capital sin of pride has a hold on us.
- ♦ *An authentic prayer life will lead us to become responsible and generous stewards of all that God has given to us.* God blesses us so that we can bless the communities we belong to. When we squander and are selfish with God's blessings, we are being the bad fruit that John says will be thrown out and burned.

Two Penance Services tomorrow, December 9 4:00pm and 7:00pm

During the holy season of Advent, every parish offers Communal Penance Services whereby members of the community can gather and confess their sins, receive absolution, and make a conscious decision to turn over a new leaf and do better as a disciple of Jesus.

Last Sunday in a homily during Mass on EWTN, the priest referred to Mother Teresa who used to urge her sisters to practice silence of the ears, eyes, mouth, mind and heart. I assume all of us can name ways we can sin through these parts of our body (see examples below).

- ♦ *Sins of the ears:* listening to gossip
- ♦ *Sins of the eyes:* looking at pornographic material
- ♦ *Sins of the mouth:* misuse of the wonderful gift of speech
- ♦ *Sins of the mind:* deliberately recalling sins of the past and other bad memories
- ♦ *Sins of the heart:* harboring bitterness and other bad stuff in our hearts

Danger. A constant danger in the spiritual life is when we merely go through the motions of receiving the sacraments. For example, we go to confess our sins, say the Act of Contrition, but then fail in our resolve to change our ways. So it is always good to pray for the grace to make a good confession.

Tell others about good Christian Catholic programs on television and radio. On EWTN television (channel 169), three shows I always tape are:

- ♦ *The Journey Home (Mondays at 8:00pm).* Marcus Grodi (former Protestant minister) interviews non-Catholics who were led to join the Church, and Catholics who left the Church and returned home.

- ♦ *Vaticano (Sundays at 11:00am)* mainly reports on all things happening at the Vatican and beyond.
- ♦ *Nightly News (6:00pm & 9:00pm)* reports on happenings in the world and Church that we never hear on other channels. My only problem with this program is that when it comes to reporting on politics, it is decidedly Republican. I say that as a registered Independent.
- ♦ *Catholic Radio.* When out and about, I often listen to either *The Catholic Channel* (Guy Lloyd in the morning) or *EWTN* (Catholic Answers). Locally, we have *Divine Mercy Catholic Radio* (920 AM).

A simple way to evangelize is to share devotionals—like the Advent Devotional—or tell others about programs on Catholic Television and Catholic Radio.

The Beatification of Fulton Sheen

Speaking about Catholic Evangelization, in the 50's, 60's and 70's, our most popular radio and television evangelist was Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen. You who remember him will be delighted to hear that on Sunday, December 21, the Venerable Fulton Sheen will be beatified. The miracle that got him to this point was that of a stillborn baby brought back to life through his intercession.

Update on Outreach to Uganda. To date, we have received the following:

- ♦ 13 gifts of \$5,000 for classrooms
- ♦ 186 sponsor gifts for Ascension Elementary School in Uganda and 9 sponsors gifts for students at Blessed Trinity High School in Uganda

So at this time we have received sufficient \$5,000 gifts to build the Ascension School. In addition, we now have five \$5,000 gifts to help Fr. Henry (my driver last summer) begin plans to build a school at his new parish—St. Peter & Paul. We do need more sponsor gifts (\$210) for our children at Ascension School.

I am SUPER grateful to all of you who are participating in this missionary outreach to Uganda. When all who can pitch in, we can make a HUGE DIFFERENCE in a very faraway place - in our universal church family

Have a blessed week,

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