

**My Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,**

**The image I get from St. Mark's account of John the Baptist is of a kind of wild man coming out of the desert, telling people they were a bunch of sinners and it was time to straighten up and get right. Mark tell us he "was clothed in camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist. He fed on locusts and wild honey.**

**Now, in a drawer somewhere I have a picture of myself astride a camel when I visited the Holy Land back in 1988, and I only remember two things about that wild beast. First, he kept turning around, trying to bite my leg, and when he couldn't do that he kept banging into a fence, trying to topple me off him. The second thing I remember is that he stunk. He really, really stunk.**

**So, as I try to conjure up this image of John the Baptist wearing camel's hair, I don't think that he smelled the best.**

**Yet, St. Mark tells us, "People of the whole Judean countryside and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem were going out to him," What was so attractive about John the Baptist? It couldn't have been what he looked like, or what he smelled like. What did all those people see in him?**

**That question got me to thinking about Pope Francis. Recently he visited Myanmar and Bangladesh, where there are very few Christians, and even fewer Catholics, but hundreds of thousands of people came out to see him and hear him and even participate in Masses with him. What did they come out to see?**

**Then I thought of Mother Teresa, now St. Teresa of Kolkutta, a tiny, wizened old woman, speaking before thousands of people all over the world, even giving a speech at the United Nations, and winning a Nobel Peace Prize. What was so magnetic about her?**

**I suspect what is true of Pope Francis and was of Mother Teresa, must also have been true of John the Baptist. People knew they were all the real deal. They lived what they believed. They spoke truth. They gave people hope. And they helped people to believe in themselves.**

**John preached a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. He insisted they could change. He told them they didn't have to stay stuck in the same old rut they found themselves in. As he lowered them gently into the flowing waters of the Jordan River, he gave them confidence that the obstacles that held them down could be washed away and their lives could be renewed and refreshed. As more and more people experienced a new joy and a greater peace in their lives, they told others. They told their families, their neighbors, their co-workers. These too flocked to John. They wanted what he had.**

**But John wanted the people to know that what they were experiencing was just a taste of what was yet to come. He basically said, “Folks, you ain’t seen nothin’ yet”! “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.”**

**Interestingly, this is how St. Mark begins his Gospel, as does John. They are not concerned with telling the story of Jesus’ birth. What was important to them, and maybe should be important to us, is that the Good News of Jesus Christ begins with repentance.**

**Now, there’s an old-fashioned word that we don’t hear much about anymore. “REPENTANCE”! Unfortunately, too few of us really know what it means. To most people it simply means saying “I’m sorry” when we’ve done something wrong or said something hurtful. But it means much more than that. The actual Greek word “Metanoia” means to turn around or inside-out. Repentance requires a willingness to change. A willingness to change an attitude; a willingness to change a perspective; a willingness to change a way of living or talking; a willingness to change a behavior.**

**By emphasizing John the Baptist’s ministry of repentance both St. Mark and St. John are telling us that without true repentance we are incapable of receiving the Good News of Jesus Christ the Son of God.**

**So, it seems fitting that as we prepare to celebrate the birth of our Savior, we might consider what needs to radically change in our lives. Perhaps a good place to start is to look at the models presented to us today. As I suggested earlier what attracted people to John the Baptist and Pope Francis and Mother Teresa was that they saw in them the “real deal”.**

**Is that what people see in you, your attitude, your perspective, your way of living or talking, or your behaviors? Or do they like you because you’ll gossip with them or laugh at their racist or off-color jokes or you’ll join in their pity parties or unwholesome behaviors? Does your faith in Jesus Christ stand out as the motivating force in your life or are you seen as just a go-along-to-get-along kind of person?**

**There was a T.V. commercial not too long ago. I think it was selling either cable or satellite T.V. You know the one where there was a modern suburban home next to a house on the prairie kind of place, where the father explains to the son, “We’re settlers, Son. We don’t need all that stuff.” Do you know the commercial I’m talking about?**

**Well, I’m afraid that too many of us simply see ourselves as “settlers”. We don’t see ourselves as John the Baptist saw himself. We’re not passionate about being “a voice of one crying out in the desert: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths” John prepared his world by pointing to Christ by the way he lived, as well as by what he said. Can you say the same?**

**We have all been baptized by Christ with the Holy Spirit. But too many of us have become “settlers”. Is this your time to repent; to turn yourself around and be renewed in the Holy Spirit?**

**In this Second Week of Advent pray to the Holy Spirit to help you to change so that those around you, your children, your parents, your family and friends and co-workers and classmates, can look at you and how you live your life, and see in you the “real deal” pointing to Christ.**