

- Have you ever wondered about all the time and effort that people put into seeking bodily perfection.
- Guys spend money on weights and bikes and running shoes and other equipment...hair pieces, hair plugs, etc.
- Ladies spend gobs of money on makeup, athletic gear...going to the body shop for hair, nails, skin, etc...facial this, moisturizer that...the current fashions.
- Plastic surgeons are in greater demand all the time.
- ...all for what inevitably fades away.
- But...how much do we work toward seeking Christian perfection? ...that which brings much lasting and greater joy, and leads to eternal reward?
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- Today we read about John the Baptist baptizing in the desert.
- Now, purification through water—the common cleanser—was nothing new; for example, the prophet Isaiah wrote: “*Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your doings from before my eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do good...*” (Isaiah 1:16-17)
- And baptizing wasn't new, but it was normally reserved only for converts TO the Jewish faith—a symbolic cleansing of his past life and coming into the new...accompanied by confession of past sins.
- Yet John baptized Jews as well, preaching what the prophets had preached: that one cannot simply assume to be in God's grace due to your connections or race or proclaimed allegiance: one must repent and live in obedience to God's will to be in His grace.
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- For example, John scolded the Pharisees, who were considered THE holy men of his time: “*You brood of vipers!...Bear fruit that befits repentance, and do not presume to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father’; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham.*” (Mt 3:7)
- In other words...your connection to the past is meaningless if you do not honor God here and now...in your actions.

- Even St. Paul did not presume on his own salvation, writing to the Corinthians: “*I beat my body and subdue it, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified*” (1 Corinthians 9:27), and to the Philippians: “*...work out your own salvation with fear and trembling...*” (Philippians 2:12)
- And, with John’s ardent call to repentance, the people came to be baptized, confessing their sins. They knew within themselves the need to “come clean”, as it were...and renew their determination to remain in God’s grace through love for Him and charity towards others.
- No doubt they recognized that their Exodus ancestors were chastised by God many times for their infidelity...but God was always ready to forgive, and to receive them back into His favor whenever they repented and returned return to Him...just as the son in the Prodigal Son parable.

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- In the same vein, we must avoid presumption of God’s mercy—the attitude: “Well, He’ll forgive me anyway.” Think about if your spouse, your kids or your friends treated you so flippantly.
 - Or, relatedly, having a careless attitude toward God...rarely or even never bothering with Him except to “check the boxes” of baptism, first communion or confirmation...or the CEOs (Christmas & Easter onlies).
 - At such ceremonies is often a sea of unfamiliar faces...and once it’s is over...gone again.
 - Yet...they’ll want a Catholic funeral...*just in case*. Again...checking the box. All of us can think of relatives and friends like that.
 - But, do we ever think of God sees that?...to ignore Him, disregard Him, disobey Him for life, yet expect the “bennies” of faithful discipleship at death.
 - That is like the grown child who never bothers with his parents... but shows up for the reading of the will expecting a full share... one of the worst examples of ingratitude, and yet what we all do with God at one time or another.

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- We know by God’s revelation to us in scripture that we must love Him above all, and love our neighbor as ourselves.
 - We are made for love—to BE loved...but also TO love.
 - In that scheme of things, the sure way to know that we please God is to put ourselves not above everyone else, but in service to others...before thinking of ourselves...because that is what Jesus, Our Lord, Himself did...saying:
 - *“Whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave; even as the Son of man [even as I] came not to be served but to serve...”*
(Matthew 20:26-28) Something He proved absolutely on the cross.

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- John the Baptist reminds us today to *“Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight His paths.”*
 - We *“prepare the way of the Lord”* by changing our lives and ridding ourselves of things offensive to Him—selfishness and the various vices.
 - This is the perfect way of preparing for Christmas and Christ’s coming—the remembrance of His first, and the reality of His second...
 - ...to prepare for Him the gift of our own cleanliness and holiness of life...to smooth the road to our hearts so that He may come in and stay awhile—come and stay forever!
 - So...as Paul says today: *“...this is my prayer: that your love may increase ever more and more in knowledge and every kind of perception, to discern what is of value, so that you may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ.”*
 - ...renewing our love for God, and seeking the good of our neighbor in all things.

Reading 1

[Bar 5:1-9](#)

Jerusalem, take off your robe of mourning and misery;
put on the splendor of glory from God forever:
wrapped in the cloak of justice from God,
bear on your head the miter
that displays the glory of the eternal name.
For God will show all the earth your splendor:
you will be named by God forever
the peace of justice, the glory of God's worship.

Up, Jerusalem! stand upon the heights;
look to the east and see your children
gathered from the east and the west
at the word of the Holy One,
rejoicing that they are remembered by God.
Led away on foot by their enemies they left you:
but God will bring them back to you
borne aloft in glory as on royal thrones.
For God has commanded
that every lofty mountain be made low,
and that the age-old depths and gorges
be filled to level ground,
that Israel may advance secure in the glory of God.
The forests and every fragrant kind of tree
have overshadowed Israel at God's command;
for God is leading Israel in joy
by the light of his glory,
with his mercy and justice for company.

Responsorial Psalm

[Ps 126:1-2, 2-3, 4-5, 6](#)

R. (3) The Lord has done great things for us; we are filled with joy.

When the LORD brought back the captives of Zion,
we were like men dreaming.

Then our mouth was filled with laughter,
and our tongue with rejoicing.

R. The Lord has done great things for us; we are filled with joy.

Then they said among the nations,

“The LORD has done great things for them.”

The LORD has done great things for us;
we are glad indeed.

R. The Lord has done great things for us; we are filled with joy.

Restore our fortunes, O LORD,

like the torrents in the southern desert.

Those who sow in tears
shall reap rejoicing.

R. The Lord has done great things for us; we are filled with joy.

Although they go forth weeping,
carrying the seed to be sown,
They shall come back rejoicing,
carrying their sheaves.

R. The Lord has done great things for us; we are filled with joy.

Reading II

[Phil 1:4-6, 8-11](#)

Brothers and sisters:

I pray always with joy in my every prayer for all of you,
because of your partnership for the gospel
from the first day until now.

I am confident of this,
that the one who began a good work in you
will continue to complete it
until the day of Christ Jesus.

God is my witness,
how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus.

And this is my prayer:

that your love may increase ever more and more
in knowledge and every kind of perception,
to discern what is of value, [“that you may sense what really matters”]
so that you may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ,
filled with the fruit of righteousness
that comes through Jesus Christ
for the glory and praise of God.

Gospel

[Lk 3:1-6](#)

In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar,
when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea,
and Herod was tetrarch of Galilee,
and his brother Philip tetrarch of the region
of Ituraea and Trachonitis,
and Lysanias was tetrarch of Abilene,
during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas,
the word of God came to John the son of Zechariah in the desert.
John went throughout the whole region of the Jordan,
proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins,
as it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah:

Year C: Advent, 2nd Sunday
2018

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*A voice of one crying out in the desert:
“Prepare the way of the Lord,
make straight his paths.
Every valley shall be filled
and every mountain and hill shall be made low.
The winding roads shall be made straight,
and the rough ways made smooth,
and **all flesh** shall see the salvation of God.”*