

Link to Liturgy



2nd Sunday of Advent “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!”

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Lessons and Discussions

Page 4 – St. John the Baptist

“John the Baptist appeared”

Page 10 – Repent and sin no more

“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!”

Page 17 – Fear of the Lord

“Produce good fruit as evidence of your repentance”

Entrance Antiphon – Is 30: 19, 30

Should be chanted so that the time of prayer, study and discussion can be made sacred. Another song can be substituted, but should have the same theme; this should not be the norm.

Source: ccwatershed.org

Populus Sion

Cf. Is 30: 19, 30

VII

P

Eople of Zi-on behold, * the Lord is coming to
save all na-tions; and the Lord shall cause you to hear
his ma-jes-tic voice for the joy of your heart.

Alternate options:

Hymns

Creator of the Stars of Night
Hail to the Lord's Anointed
Lo, How a Rose E'er Blooming

Praise

Here I am to Worship
Prepare the Way

Remnant

Light of the World

Collect – Roman Missal

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.
Amen

Almighty and merciful God,
may no earthly undertaking hinder those
who set out in haste to meet your Son,
but may our learning of heavenly wisdom
gain us admittance to his company.
Who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

[46] Galatians 5:19-21 (Fruits of Holy Spirit, 5:22-23)

[47] The Catholic Catechism pg. 205

[48] Isaiah 11:1-3

[49] Open Wide the Doors to Christ pg. 216

[50] Modern Catholic Dictionary pg. 230

[51] Penny Catechism

[52] The Catholic Catechism pg. 205

[53] 1 John 4:18

[54] Modern Catholic Dictionary pg. 205

[55] Psalm 119:120

[56] Proverbs 1:7 and 9:10

[57] Matthew 3:11

[58] Matthew 3:11

[59] Pope Benedict XVI (<http://www.catholicculture.org/culture/library/view.cfm?recnum=6457>)

[60] Catechism of the Catholic Church 1430-31

was made known by the message of an angel may, by His Passion and Cross, be brought to the glory of His resurrection. Through the same Christ our Lord. Amen

“The End” Notes

- [1] Matthew 3:2 (Saint John the Baptist); Matthew 4:17 (Jesus)
- [2] Luke 1:13
- [3] Luke 1:37
- [4] Luke 1:41
- [5] Luke 1:18
- [6] Luke 1:19-20
- [7] Luke 1:36
- [8] Gospel Canticle; Luke 1:68-79
- [9] 2 Kings 1:8
- [10] Roman Breviary Divine Intimacy pg. 24
- [11] Matthew 3:5
- [12] In conversation with God pg. 58
- [13] John 1:15
- [14] John 1:29
- [15] Matthew 14:3-12
- [16] Modern Catholic Dictionary pg. 295
- [17] Saint Gregory Palamas
- [18] Pope John Paul II; Sollicitudo Rei Socialis; 37
- [19] 1 Peter 1:6-7
- [20] Magnificat Monthly Vol. 12, No. 10 pg. 76
- [21] Catechism of the Catholic Church; 1304
- [22] Catechism of the Catholic Church; 1304
- [23] Catechism of the Catholic Church; 1303
- [24] Matthew 28:19-20
- [25] Catechism of the Catholic Church; 1303
- [26] www.usccb.org/liturgy/penance.shtml
- [27] *Rite of Penance*, no. 45
- [28] The Order of the Mass; Penitential Rite
- [29] Sunday Compline; Divine Office; page 55
- [30] Matthew 5:48
- [31] Matthew 5:48
- [32] Catechism of the Catholic Church 1847
- [33] CCC 1863
- [34] *Lumen Gentium* 53, 56
- [35] CCC 1131
- [36] John 3:16
- [37] Philippians 4:13
- [38] Matthew 3:10
- [39] CCC - 679
- [40] 1 Cor. 10:13
- [41] The Way
- [42] Matthew 3:2
- [43] Matthew 11:28
- [44] Matthew 11:30
- [45] Catechism of the Catholic Church; 1832

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

Gospel Reading – Matthew 3:1-12 – Roman Missal

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew
- Glory to you O Lord

John the Baptist appeared, preaching in the desert of Judea and saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!” It was of him that the prophet Isaiah had spoken when he said: A voice of one crying out in the desert, Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths. John wore clothing made of camel’s hair and had a leather belt around his waist. His food was locusts and wild honey. At that time Jerusalem, all Judea, and the whole region around the Jordan were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the Jordan River as they acknowledged their sins.

When he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Produce good fruit as evidence of your repentance. And do not presume to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ For I tell you, God can raise up children to Abraham from these stones. Even now the ax lies at the root of the trees. Therefore every tree that does not bear good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire. I am baptizing you with water, for repentance, but the one who is coming after me is mightier than I. I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fan is in his hand. He will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into his barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.”

The Gospel of the Lord.
- Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ

Spiritual Reading

From St. Jose Maria Escriva

We are witnesses and precursors. We have to bear witness and at the same time we have to show others the way. Our responsi-

bility is great, because to be Christ's witnesses implies first and foremost that we should try to live our lives according to his doctrine that we should struggle to make our actions remind others of Jesus and his most lovable personality. We have to act in such a way that others will be able to say, when they meet us: This man is a Christian, because he does not hate, because he is willing to understand, because he is not a fanatic, because he is willing to make sacrifices, because he shows that he is a man of peace, because he knows how to love.

Responsory – Office of Readings

Second Sunday of Advent (Matthew 11:11, 9)

The herald of the Lord approaches, of whom the Lord says:

- No one born of woman is greater than John the Baptist

Truly this is a great prophet, and more than a prophet, of whom the Lord says:

- No one born of woman is greater than John the Baptist

John the Baptist – Lesson and Discussion

"John the Baptist appeared"

In today's Gospel reading we hear again a call of repentance. In Chapters three and four of Matthew's gospel, we hear the words "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." [1] This is the first phrase that comes from the mouths of both Saint John the Baptist and Our Lord as they begin to preach. It is this mere, simple man who utters the very same words as Our Lord. John's proximity to Our Lord makes him very different than any other man of his time. He is definitely a man worth paying attention too.

Who was John the Baptist? Most of our knowledge about John the Baptist comes from the Gospels. He was the son of Zechariah and Elizabeth. Zechariah was an elderly priest at the time of John's birth and Elizabeth was sterile, but was able to conceive John through the power of God. [2] Elizabeth is the cousin of Mary and her pregnancy was made known to Our Lady by the angel Gabriel as a sign that "nothing will be impossible with God". [3] Mary then travels to visit her cousin and when she greets Elizabeth, the infant John leaps for joy in her womb. [4]

Marian Antiphon – Alma Redemptoris Mater

V
A L-ma * Redemptó-ris Ma-ter, quæ pérvī-a cæ-li
porta manes, Et stella ma-ris, succúrre cadénti súrge-
re qui cu-rat pópu-lo: Tu quæ genu-ísti, na-tú-ra mi-
ránte, tu-um sanctum Ge-ni-tó-rem: Virgo pri-us ac po-
sté-ri-us, Gabri-él-is ab o-re sumens illud Ave, pecca-
tó-rum mi-se-ré-re.

Alma Redemptoris Mater (English Translation)

Loving mother of the Redeemer, open door to heaven and star of the sea, come quickly to the aid of thy people, fallen indeed but striving to stand again. To nature's astonishment thou wert the mother of thy holy Creator without ceasing to be a virgin, and heard from Gabriel that greeting: "Hail." Have pity on us sinners.

V. The Angel of the Lord declared unto Mary.

R. And she conceived by the Holy Spirit.

Let us pray. Pour forth, we beseech Thee, O Lord, Thy grace into our hearts, that we to whom the incarnation of Christ Thy Son

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.
Amen

O my God,
I am heartily sorry for
having offended Thee,
and I detest all my sins,
because I dread the loss of heaven,
and the pains of hell;
but most of all because
they offend Thee, my God,
Who are all good and
deserving of all my love.
I firmly resolve,
with the help of Thy grace,
to confess my sins,
to do penance,
and to amend my life.
Amen.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.
Amen

The angel Gabriel, who appeared to Mary to announce the birth of Jesus, also appeared to Zechariah to announce the birth of John. Unlike Mary however, Zechariah questions the angel “how shall I know this?” and, as a consequence of his unbelief, he was made mute.[5] Gabriel says to him, “I am Gabriel, who stand before God. I was sent to speak to you and to announce to you this good news. But now you will be speechless and unable to talk until the day these things take place, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled at the proper time.”[6]

Both Our Lady and Zechariah’s canticles are remembered daily in the liturgy of the Church as she prays the Benedictus (Canticle of Zechariah from Luke 1:68-79) each morning at lauds and the Magnificat (Canticle of Mary from Luke 1:46-55) each evening at vespers.

ACTIVITY – Mary and Zechariah

Chant or read both the Benedictus and the Magnificat. What are the similarities between Our Lady’s response and the response of Zechariah?

Saint John the Baptist has two feast days in the Church year, one is his birth and the other his beheading. We celebrate the birth of Saint John the Baptist on June 24. He was conceived six months before Christ was conceived. We know it was six months by the words of the angel Gabriel, “And behold, Elizabeth, your relative, has also conceived a son in her old age, and this is the sixth month for her who was called barren.”[7]

There is a reason that these two people, Jesus and John are connected not only in the Gospel and in their mission, but also in the liturgical year. The season of Advent comes to us during the darkest and coldest time of the year, when it is as if all of creation is in need of heat and light. The shortest and darkest day of the year is the winter solstice, December 21st. The nativity of our Lord, the birth of He who is the light of the world and the warmth of all souls, occurs just three days after the solstice, during the cold and dark days of the year. The longest and brightest day of the year is the summer solstice, June 21st. The nativity of Saint John the Baptist, the forerunner of our Lord, comes three days after the summer solstice during the warm and bright days of the year. From the summer solstice on, the days will become shorter, darker, and in time colder. The feast of the birth of Saint John the Baptist reminds us that things are

getting darker and colder, but prepares us and gives us hope that in the dark and cold a Savior will be born. The canticle of Zechariah, which is prayed every morning in the Church says, “In the tender compassion of our God the dawn from on high shall break upon us, to shine on those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death, and to guide our feet into the way of peace.”[8]

What did John the Baptist look like? We know that John the Baptist lived a very austere life. He lived off the land around him, dressed in clothing made of camel hair, eating food of grasshoppers and honey. He is a man who completely detached from everything and living a life of penance in the desert. Saint John the Baptist is living in the tradition of the Old Testament prophets, of which he is the last. We see in the 2nd book of Kings that Saint John the Baptist’s life is after the pattern of the prophet Elijah. “The king asked them, ‘What was the man like who came up to you and said these things to you?’ ‘Wearing a hairy garment,’ they replied, ‘with a leather girdle about his loins.’ ‘It is Elijah the Tishbite!’ he exclaimed.”[9] “His example invites us to look with inside ourselves, within the desert of our hearts. We should look into this interior to await the coming of Christ in deep meditation, silence, and solitude, as much as our state in life permits. Lastly, we should holdfast and persevere in the waiting in spite of discouragements.”[10]

What did John the Baptist do? Like Jesus, there is little known about John’s childhood and upbringing. We see his first actions of public ministry in today’s Gospel reading. He began preaching and baptizing people in the Jordan River. He was baptizing people from all of Judea, Jerusalem, and the whole area around the Jordan River as it says in Scripture.[11] “His whole life’s mission was to prepare a people for Jesus capable of receiving the Kingdom of God. God, even while in his mother’s womb, determined this vocation.”[12] John’s entire life is a testimony to Christ, from his recognition of Christ in Elizabeth’s womb to his admittance that “a man is coming after me who ranks ahead of me because he existed before me.”[13] In the Gospel of John, John the Baptist immediately recognizes Christ and proclaims “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world.”[14]

Remainder of John’s life Soon after his preaching at the Jordan, John was arrested and thrown in prison by order of Herod. John the Baptist spoke out against an unlawful union between

causes us to submit our lives to Him in all things.

MUSIC VIDEO - “How He Loves” by David Crowder Band - POP CULTURE CONNECTION - 4:07

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TCunuL58odQ>

The very first words are how He (God) is jealous for us. That He loves you more than anyone or anything that you can ever know. We should be terrified to lose this love, and the gift of fear of the Lord helps us to be aware of how beautiful He is and how great God’s affection is for us.

How does fear of the Lord relate to the Gospel reading?

In the Gospel, John rebukes the Pharisees and the Sadducees because they do not have the gift of the fear of the Lord. If they did, then they would not have counted on their status as children of Abraham as being enough to merit God’s love. The fear of losing God’s love would have initiated the repentance in them that causes good works. John the Baptist, on the other hand, perfectly exhibits the gift of fear of the Lord. He knew the greatness of the Lord, which gave him the great humility to say, “I am not worthy to carry his sandals.”[57] He understood the power of the Lord as made evident by his comments on the gathering the wheat but burning the chaff.[58] Finally, “Thanks to fear of the Lord there is no fear of the evil that rages in history and one takes up again with vigor the journey of life, as the prophet Isaiah declared: ‘Strengthen the hands that are feeble, make firm the knees that are weak, say to those whose hearts are frightened: Be strong, fear not!’ (Isaiah 35:3-4).”[59]

Profession of Faith or Popular Devotion – Act of Contrition

“Jesus’ call to conversion and penance, like that of the prophets before Him, does not aim first at outward works, “sackcloth and ashes,” fasting and mortification, but at the CONVERSION OF THE HEART, INTERIOR CONVERSION. Without this, such penances remain sterile and false; however, interior conversion urges expression in visible signs, gestures and works of penance. Interior repentance is a radical reorientation of our whole life, a return, a conversion to God with all our heart, an end of sin, a turning away from evil, with repugnance toward the evil actions we have committed. At the same time it entails the desire and resolution to change one’s life, with hope in God’s mercy and trust in the help of His grace.”[60]

“There is not fear in love, but perfect love drives out fear because fear has to do with punishment, and so one who fears is not yet perfect in love.”[53]

Three Elements to this gift[54]:

(1) It gives a vivid sense of God’s greatness; a deep sorrow for the least faults committed, and gives us the drive to avoid occasions of sin.

(2) It is expressed in the Psalm “My whole being trembles before you, your ruling fills me with fear”[55]

(3) It gives a spirit of deep humility in dealing with others, especially those that are inferior to us, because it makes us aware that we stand before the judgment of God and how we treat them.

MOVIE- The Family Man Ending Scene - POP CULTURE CONNECTION – 2:49

<http://youtu.be/N7UtdTiuO3w>

He is a stock broker and is a millionaire now...one day he sees himself in a dream, supporting a family of four, is happily married to the woman he left long ago for pursuing some career opportunity and went to London...Although it was a dream, nothing was so real before this. He experiences how the other half of the population lives and finds that it is what real living is. When he comes out of the dream, he finds that woman again but she is about to leave to settle in Paris for her work. It’s the last scenario of the movie where he explains what he saw and what he believes to be the actual purpose of life. He is afraid to lose her and it is this fear that motivates him to act, to change his way and to choose her, to choose them, to choose their family. **How have we experienced the fear of losing something and thus were motivated to act and change?** Maybe we feared losing a game, losing first chair in the band and were motivated to try even harder and practice even more. Out of all these valid fears, the fear of losing Grace, friendship with God, should motivate us more than the rest.

What else does it do for me?

By loving God more and fearing that loss of love, the gift also drives out our lesser fears. By living the Christian life, the gift of fear of the Lord helps us realize charity casts out fear. God’s love becomes so intense for us that it dominates all of our priorities. In Scripture we find that “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.”[56] This gift of the Holy Spirit is the beginning of true wisdom because our love for God and fear of offending Him

Herod and Herodias, the wife of Herod’s brother, Philip. At the birthday feast of Herod, the daughter of Herodias performed a dance for King Herod. It delighted him so much that he promised to give her anything she asked for. The daughter went to her mother who prompted her to ask for the head of John the Baptist. Although distressed, King Herod ordered it, and brought the head to her. John the Baptist’s followers collected his body and gave a proper burial.[15]

How was John the Baptist looked at by the people in that day?

In today’s culture, if we saw someone like this we would think he was crazy! But in those days, many were so impressed by him that they mistook him for the Messiah. However, as we know in today’s Gospel he told of one greater than he to come. The common people revered him while the Pharisees showed their disdain for him by refusing to be baptized.[16] The Pharisees were comfortable in their own self-righteousness. Since they thought to themselves “we have Abraham as our Father” they assumed they were fine, not in need of saving or help. Saint John the Baptist, wakes them up by calling them a “brood of vipers.” He tells them and us that this is a wounded world and we do not have a perfect life, but instead need are in need of a savior and in need of repentance. He challenges all people with the uncomfortable truth that God “will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into his barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.” This adds a sense of urgency to his call to repentance.

What are things in our society that wake us up to the reality that this is an imperfect world and that our lives are imperfect?

We experience sin everyday, from an inappropriate bumper sticker on the car in front of us en route to school or work, to the violence and disrespect for human life in a song or video. From the sin we find in offensive ads on the Internet to the negative effect of unjust wages and the objectification of people. Saint John the Baptist cries out for us to “produce good fruit as evidence of your repentance.” Christian life is a life of repentance that we are called to lead each day of our life, not only during Lent and Advent. “Repentance is the beginning, middle and end of the Christian way of life.”[17]

The world, now and at the time of Saint John the Baptist, proves that just as the “fruits” of repentance can be seen, so also the “fruits” of sin and stubbornness can be seen. We may try to ignore the reality of sin, but that is also dangerous. Ayn Rand, an

American novelist/philosopher/playwright/screenwriter said, “We can ignore reality, but we cannot ignore the consequence of ignoring reality.” The “fruits” spoken of in this Gospel are the consequences, either good or bad, of reality. When we repent and change our lives, we are able to produce good fruits, but if we chose not to repent of our wicked ways then we will only be able to produce bad fruits. If we acknowledge the fruit (consequence) we must also acknowledge the tree (the action). John Paul II tells us that the fruits of sin can add up in society, it is “the fruit of many sins which lead to ‘structures of sin.’”[18]

[See also Link to Liturgy Lesson - What is Sin?]

[See also Link to Liturgy Lesson - The Effects of Sin]

What are some examples of “structures of sin” that are deeply rooted society and show us that in deed there is need of repentance? We think of industries based on sin and the sum of sins, such as abortion, pornography, sex trafficking, prostitution, etc. Just as it is important to end these “structures of sin” it is equally important to not just ignore them as if they are invisible, or push them out of our community into another. We can no longer pretend we live in a sinless world. The Gospel speaks of avoiding sin and pursuing good. It is only possible to avoid something that actually exists. We cannot pretend that sin does not exist. We must acknowledge sin and the sum of sins, which are called the “structures of sin.” After we have acknowledged that sin does indeed exist, then we must work to avoid sin. Pope Paul VI said that the greatest sin of the century (20th Century) was the loss of the sense of sin.

Why is John teaching “repentance” in today’s Gospel? John preaches on repentance to prepare everyone for the Lord, the one for whom they had been longing. He preached so that we might have hope in the Lord who was to come with “the Holy Spirit and fire.” The reference to “fire” was probably, in John’s view, a reference to judgment. In faith we receive the sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation and receive the gift of the Holy Spirit and Saint Peter tells us that our faith will be tested through fire. “In this you rejoice, although now for a little while you may have to suffer through various trials, so that the genuineness of your faith, more precious than gold that is perishable even though tested by fire, may prove to be for praise, glory, and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”[19] The Lord came to his people to tame the wicked, stop the ruin, and bring salvation. However, a thing can only be received if the one who is re-

Fear of the Lord – Lesson and Discussion

“Produce good fruit as evidence of your repentance”

One of the gifts of the Holy Spirit is fear of the Lord. It is typically listed as the last of the gifts, but is the “first in the rising scale of value.”[47]. In the first reading, we hear Isaiah announcing the gifts, which the Lord, in the Holy Spirit, would bring.[48] Fear of the Lord can be misunderstood especially in today’s world. However, once understood and embraced, it will become an invaluable gift that God gives each and everyone of us.

What is the gift Fear of the Lord? - “The gift of Fear of the Lord is the presence of a healthy fear or awe of God’s Power, majesty, and justice. It is the understanding of the greatness of God and all he is and all that he deserves from us.[49] This gift is infused within us.[50]

Does fear of the Lord mean I should be afraid of God? No not all. In fact, this fear is filial not servile. Servile fear causes us to dread the punishment from God for what we have done, whereas filial is the fear of losing the love we receive from the Lord. Fear and Love are two emotions that guide much of our lives. “We must hate sin above all other evils, so as to be resolved never to commit a willful sin, for the love or fear of anything whatsoever.”[51]

We sin if we fear something more than we fear God. **What is an example of fearing something more than God?** I fear death and so when asked to deny Christ or die, I deny Christ. I fear losing friends and so when my friends say they will leave if I continue to strive for a holy lifestyle, I give up on my call to holiness. We sin if we love something more than we love God.

What is an example of loving something more than God? I love to be in control of my life and love not having to be told what to do, so I refuse to be obedient to Christ and His Church. I love to run from my problems by “feeling good” and escape reality by seeking things that captivate my senses, so I refuse to turn to God, the Sacraments, and prayer in times of trouble. In these examples, we see how we can choose our own will and desires over and above God’s Will. Now, when we fear the loss of heaven and the pains of hell, we are motivated by the love of God whom we are afraid of losing.[52] Fear is driven away by love and love is perfected in Christ. Saint John says in his letter,

site of these fruits in our lives, which Saint Paul calls, the “works of the flesh” they are evidence and indications of an unrepentant heart. “Now the works of the flesh are obvious: immorality, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, hatreds, rivalry, jealousy, outbursts of fury, acts of selfishness, dissensions, factions, occasions of envy, drinking bouts, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.”[46]

Why is repentance necessary? Saint John the Baptist says that repentance is necessary to enter the Kingdom of Heaven, “repent for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand”. Saint Paul warns that if we do not produce good fruits, which are evidence of repentance, we “will not inherit the kingdom of God”. It is clear from both these Saints and Our Lord that a repentant heart is not optional but a necessary.

ACTIVITY – Do you know your fruits?

You will need 3 kinds of fruit, 2 of each kind, and two small powdered donuts. Break the group up into two groups of four. Have eight chairs set out that are facing the crowd, put a space in between chair 4 and 5 so that the two groups can be distinguished. All those in the chairs, once seated, will be blindfolded. STEP ONE - The person in chair 1 (team one) and the person in chair 5 (team two) will be given a fruit at the count of three. They will be given the same fruit and may only smell and feel the fruit, the first person to correctly guess what the fruit is, gains a point for their team. Those two players can take off the blindfold but they must remain quiet and not help their teammates. The person in chair 2 (team one) and the person in chair 6 (team two) will be given a different fruit at the count of three. Follow same instructions as step one and do so for chair 3 and 7. When you get to chair 4 (team one) and chair 8 (team two) instead of giving a fruit at the count of three place a powdered donut in the player’s hands. We are playing a joke on them but also proving the point that people know very well physical fruits and what is not a fruit. If someone were sent to the store with a list of fruits, they would not be able to buy them if they did not know how the fruits look. In the same way, if we do not even know the fruits of the Holy Spirit, how are we to look for them and practice them in our lives? After the game you could have a contest between the teams to see how many of the 12 fruits of the Holy Spirit they could name.

ceiving it is ready to receive it.[20] This is why John was sent before the Lord to call out then, as he is calling out now to us, to repent so that we may receive Jesus.

What was the purpose of John baptizing? The purpose of John baptizing in the desert was to prepare people for Jesus. **What is the purpose of the Sacrament of Baptism in the Church?** It is to receive Christ. The Sacrament of Baptism is “the door” in which we begin to live a sacramental life. One must first be baptized before receiving the other sacraments. Confirmation for example is the gift of strength that completes and fortifies baptismal grace. “Like Baptism which it completes, Confirmation is given only once, for it too imprints on the soul an *indelible spiritual mark*, the “character,” which is the sign that Jesus Christ has marked a Christian with the seal of his Spirit by clothing him with power from on high so that he may be his witness.”[21] The Sacrament of Confirmation is a personal Pentecost in which that first Pentecost is perpetuated to each soul.

How are Baptism and Confirmation linked? The sacrament of Confirmation “completes Baptism”[22] and “brings an increase and deepening of baptismal grace.”[23] Just as baptism prepares us to live the Sacramental Life, Confirmation prepares us to answer the call of Christ. Specifically, to “go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.”[24] In this command of Christ we see faith (baptize them) and morals (teaching them to observe). Confirmation therefore prepares us to go out into battle, to be true believers and disciples of Christ by leading lives of faith and morals. “It gives us a special strength...to spread and defend the faith by word and action as true witnesses of Christ, to confess the name of Christ boldly, and never to be ashamed of the Cross.”[25] Saint John the Baptist shows us that we are called both to a Sacramental Life and to evangelize all nations by bringing the life of Christ to the World. Baptism is the door into the Sacramental Life; Confirmation is the door into the life of evangelization, the life of a martyr (which comes from the Greek word for witness).

[See also Link to Liturgy Lesson - Confirmation: Completes Baptismal Grace]

[See also Link to Liturgy Video Lesson - Confirmation: Completes Baptismal Grace]

MUSIC VIDEO - “Instead of a Show” by Jon Foreman - POP CULTURE CONNECTION - 4:04

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6uE1l75aiZc>

The lyrics speak of what John the Baptist saw in his day. People, who had fallen away from the Lord, and those who pretended to be religious figures, but were worse than criminals. The song calls for a flood of justice and righteous living. John the Baptist called everyone to repent and live a life that would bear good fruit for everyone to see. **Are there those who refuse to enter through the two doors of Baptism and Confirmation?** Yes! Some refuse to enter Baptism and thus don't want to open themselves to the sacramental life. Some are baptized but refuse to live a sacramental life. Some are baptized but don't want to enter through the door of Confirmation because they are afraid to “go out into the world” as a martyr and witness to Christ.

Go and sin no more - Lesson and Discussion

“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!”

When we were younger and we got into trouble, sometimes our parents would put us in “time out”. A “time out” helped us to think about the choices we had made. After some time had passed, our parents would talk to us and make sure we understood why we were punished and how to avoid making those same bad choices in the future.

Does our soul need a “time out”? Do we give ourselves a “time out” to think of how we have offended God and how we can stop doing it? One way to give your soul a “time out” is to make a good examination of conscience and then pray an Act of Contrition each night. If we diligently make this practice we will be ready for the Sacrament of Penance.

Why do we need the Sacrament of Penance? “Because of human weakness . . . Christians ‘turn aside from [their] early love’ (see Rev 2:4) and even break off their friendship with God by sinning. The Lord, therefore, instituted a special sacrament of penance for the pardon of sins committed after baptism. The Church has faithfully celebrated the sacrament throughout the centuries—in varying ways, but retaining its essential elements.”[26]

[See also Link to Liturgy Video Lesson - Two Waters (Act of

I am?

St. Jose Maria Escriva once said, “...don't say, that's the way I am, it's my character. It's your lack of character! Be a man! When you decide to live a clean life...it will be a crown of triumph”[41] He was speaking of chastity, but this can be seen as applying to any fault that we may have. We may try to shrug it off, but we must face it head on if we want to receive the everlasting reward God has prepared for us.

Why does it even matter to repent? Can't I just wait until I'm older? Your soul is at stake! “The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand!”[42] We must thank and praise God for today by repenting, asking for forgiveness for what we have done, and coming to Him now! The Pharisees and Sadducees came to the baptism of John but the Gospel does not say that they were willing to be baptized, instead they ask questions and remain bystanders.

It is never too late to do the right thing, to repent. We will be able to “produce good fruit” when we turn from sin. We will be able to find rest[43], and Christ will make our troubles and burdens lighter.[44] With the chains not tying us down, we are able to go and proclaim the good news, tell others to repent by leaving the life of old and following the way of the Lord.

What does the gospel mean by “produce good fruit as evidence of your repentance”? If we are repentant people and living a life of repentance it will be evident from the fruits we bear in life. True repentance changes one's life radically as we seek to live according to God's Will and not our own. Simply saying that we repent does not show evidence of that reality; it is in the actions of our life's work that we can see the fruits of a repentant life.

What are the fruits that are evident in a repentant life? What are some examples of these fruits that we see in our life and the lives of others? “The fruits of the Spirit are perfections that the Holy Spirit forms in us as the first fruits of eternal glory. The tradition of the Church lists twelve of them: charity, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, generosity, faithfulness, modesty, self-control, chastity.”[45]

What are some examples of the bad fruits, the works of the flesh that we see in our lives and the lives of others? If we see these fruits in our lives or the lives of others, they are the evidence and indication of a repentant heart. If we see the oppo-

Every time we sin, we offend God and hurt ourselves. By avoiding repentance we put our soul in grave danger. As it said in the Gospel today, “Even now the ax lies at the root of the trees.”[38] When we fail to show repentance for our sins, we reject His grace and pass judgment on ourselves. “By rejecting grace in this life, one already judges oneself, receives according to one’s works, and can even condemn oneself for all eternity by rejecting the Spirit of love.”[39] Our sins tend to have a ripple effect. When we lie, we can hurt someone else or give false account of a person. When we commit sins of omission, meaning we fail to do something, we can hurt others by our lack of action. When we view others in our minds as objects, it can hurt us because we are not treating them with the full respect and dignity that every human deserves.

What if sin is an addiction?

It only takes about four weeks to get addicted to something. Anything can be an addiction: Drugs, alcohol, sex, porn, food, Internet, phone, television, clothes, shoes, work, etc. It can take twice as long to beat an addiction and even then we may still be tempted by it for the rest of our life. Just because we may be tempted with something for the rest of our life, does not give us the right to indulge in that sin. The first step in overcoming an addiction, as the twelve-step process says, is admitting that you have an addiction and having the desire to seek help. There are many great counselors and people who can help us overcome any addiction we may have. Martin Luther King Jr. said, “Take the first step in faith. You don’t have to see the whole staircase, just take the first step.”

In times when we are fighting off temptations or when we find ourselves in the midst of a trial, we should take comfort in the words of St. Paul, “No trial has come to you but what is human. God is faithful and will not let you be tried beyond your strength; but with the trial he will also provide a way out, so that you may be able to bear it.”[40]

An addiction is a habituation to sin that reaches the point of necessity. Saint Bernard traces back all habituation to our thoughts. He says, “Thoughts led to pleasure, pleasure to consent, consent to action, action to habit, habit to necessity.” So let us work hard to control our thoughts so they do not grow into something much worse.

What if I can’t help myself from doing it or it’s just the way

Contrition)]

When we go to Confession we acknowledge that we have offended God by our thoughts, actions, and omissions. We also reflect on how we have hurt both our neighbors and ourselves. Near the end of confession we say the Act of Contrition. We make a promise to God, “I firmly intend, with your help, to do penance, to sin no more, and to avoid whatever leads me to sin.” [27] We are repenting from sin and asking God to help us sin no more. We know that we cannot repent from sin on our own, we must continually ask for help in avoiding sin. During the Confiteor at every Mass, we ask for the help of God and ask “blessed Mary, ever virgin, all the angels and saints, and you, my brothers and sisters”[28] to pray for us. An older form of the Confiteor, which is prayed each night after the Examination of Conscience in the Officium Divinum, asks the Saints and Angels by name to pray for us. “I beseech blessed Mary, ever Virgin, blessed Michael the Archangel, blessed John the Baptist, the holy Apostles Peter and Paul and all the Saints to pray for me to the Lord our God.”[29] Saint John the Baptist is placed third in the list, right after Mary and Michael and before the great Saints of the Church, Peter and Paul. Saint John the Baptist is the saint of repentance and a powerful help in avoiding sin.

What do we mean when we promise “to sin no more”?

“Nobody is perfect!”[30]

It means exactly what it says, to sin no more! We understand that left to our own power, we will never be able to accomplish a life without sin. That is why we preface our promise by saying, “with your (God’s) help.” Only with God’s help can we fully keep from sinning. God is perfect and He allows us to participate in his perfection through the gift of His Grace. He made Mary perfect at her conception and He alone offers His Grace that makes us perfect. Although we are not perfect, we should be on the path of perfection. Blessed John Paul II said the path of perfection consists in “your yes” and “God’s grace”. We know we are called to walk this path of perfection for Jesus says, “be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect.”[31] He calls us to be perfect in mercy and have perfect love. Are we ourselves working towards perfection or away from it? When someone is learning music they practice long hours in order to perform perfectly and get every note right. We must strive to live perfectly by choosing to cooperate with God’s grace at every moment of our lives. To receive his mercy, we must admit our faults. “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we

confess our sins, he is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”[32]

VIDEO - Deaf girl playing violin- POP CULTURE CONNECTION - 4:03

<http://youtu.be/Um9KsrH377A>

The video shows a deaf girl who, with all the attacks against her from others and from within, is able to triumph. Within our souls and ourselves, we are constantly being attacked by Satan telling us we are not that good, that we will amount to nothing, and we should just not even try. In those cases we must turn to God and implore Him to help us along our road to perfection.

Is it possible to really sin no more? It is possible for us to avoid greater, mortal sins in and through God’s help alone. However, it is not possible for man on earth to avoid every sin.

“While he is in the flesh, man cannot help but have at least some light sins. But do not discount these sins which we call “light”: if you take them for light when you weigh them, tremble when you count them. A number of light objects makes a great mass; a number of drops fills a river; a number of grains makes a heap. What then is our hope? Above all, confession.”[33] The Blessed Virgin Mary is the exception as through the Grace of God she avoided all sin. This is a unique privilege given to Mary alone. “Because of this gift of sublime grace, she far surpasses all other creatures, both in heaven and on earth.”[34] We ask the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary to cooperate fully with the Grace of God, to avoid sin, and pursue good.

STORY – Saint Mary of Egypt

Saint Mary of Egypt is a prime example of turning from a life of great sin to a life of “little” sin. Saint Mary of Egypt’s life is a testimony of God’s Grace conquering sin. Mary, from the age of 12 to 29, lived a life of public prostitution. At the age of 29, Mary went on pilgrimage to Jerusalem, not for holy reasons but rather in hopes that she would meet some clients on the ship and ports. They happened to be in Jerusalem on the feast of the Exaltation of the Cross and so her group visited the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, where a relic of the True Cross is venerated. Mary attempted to enter the Church four times but was prevented by an invisible force. Mary, upset at not being able to enter, went to a statue of Our Lady outside the Church where she bitterly wept and beat her chest in repentance of her long life of sin. She promised to “sin no more” and listen to Our Lady’s direction on the manner in which she should live the rest of her

life. After repenting, she entered the Church and kissed the relic of the True Cross. She returned to the statue of Mary and while praying, she heard a voice from afar which told her to cross the Jordan there she would find peace. Mary reached the Jordan and there receive Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament in a Church dedicated to Saint John the Baptist. She then traveled into the desert and, for 47 years, lived a life of solitude and penance, similar to that of Saint John the Baptist. It is only in God’s holy providence that this great sinner, turned Saint, imitated the great Saint of conversion and penance, Saint John the Baptist, not only living like him but receiving the Blessed Sacrament at a Church named in his honor.

How does God help us from sinning? There are countless ways God helps us from sinning. First, He gave us our conscience to be able to determine right from wrong. Then He gave us a guardian angel to watch over us, protect us from harm, and be there for us. He also gave us the lives of the Saints to be examples of how we can rise up in every occasion to conquer sin.

He gives us the Sacraments, especially the Sacraments of Confession and the Eucharist. We must be in the state of Grace, without mortal sin, to receive Him in the Eucharist. If we are not in the state of grace, we need to receive the Sacrament of Confession. In this sacrament, God forgives our sins, wipes away our guilt, and gives the graces necessary to overcome sin in the future. “The sacraments are efficacious signs of grace, instituted by Christ and entrusted to the Church, by which divine life is dispensed to us. The visible rites by which the sacraments are celebrated signify and make present the graces proper to each sacrament. They bear fruit in those who receive them with the required dispositions.”[35]

God gave us His Holy Mother, Mary, as a human example of the perfection that we are all called to achieve. She was perfect from the moment of conception in her mother’s womb, through the Grace of God. She remained perfect and sinless for her whole life by cooperating with the Grace that God gave her.

Finally, God gave us “his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life.”[36] Because of Jesus Christ we can say with the apostle Paul, “I can do all things in him who strengthened me.”[37]

Who do we hurt when we sin?