

Last weekend, I promised to introduce us to three individuals who are eager to be our guides in our Advent adventure of going out and meeting Jesus as he journeys towards us. I did not come up with this on my own. These three figures of Advent are based on a meditation written by a German Jesuit priest named Fr Alfred Delp who was a leader in the resistance against the Nazis during World War II. He was arrested in 1944, then tortured and murdered by the Nazis in 1945. His letters and meditations were written for the spiritual edification of his fellow prisoners and they were also smuggled out of the prison for non-prisoners as well. So Fr Delp is an unofficial fourth guide and companion for us on our journey.

Our first official guide is John the Baptist. Scripture tells us that John was the son of the Virgin Mary's cousin Elizabeth, which makes John and Jesus cousins as well. Today's gospel refers to John as the voice crying out in the desert for us to prepare a path for the Lord. Historically, when an important person was on the way for a visit, messengers would be sent out into the countryside to alert the people so they could do everything possible to clear the road so nothing would hinder the person's arrival.

The voice in the wilderness carries with it a couple more spiritual meanings with it though. Fr Delp saw it as something that was needed to shake us awake out of our complacency. A sudden loud voice in a silent deserted land would certainly do that. 83 years ago on the 2nd Sunday of Advent, December 7 1941, a day which lives in infamy, Fr Delp's homily from Munich spoke about being shaken awake. He asks are we still capable of being shaken awake? We know about thousands and thousands of things. We know about things we don't like and are evil—but we have grown accustomed to them, we tolerate them. Is it possible for us to be shaken awake to the awareness of those things to the point where we will stand up and say “no more”? That is what the voice in the wilderness does. That is the job of a prophet.

John the Baptist was the transition from the age of the Old Testament prophets to the age of the messianic prophets. True prophets of all ages raise their voices against the injustices of their time. The voice in the wilderness today can be a voice crying out for justice for the unborn and the elderly and the homeless and immigrants and all other vulnerable people. Even better, though, than raising our voices is extending our hands. Even a little hand can do a lot of good. In 1942, in another 2nd Sunday of Advent homily, Fr Delp said: “Our hearts must be keenly alert for opportunities in our own little corners of daily life. May we stand in this world, not as people in hiding, but as those who help prepare the

way of the only-begotten Son of God.*” Little actions can have big impacts especially when we entrust our works into God’s hands. Even the smallest person can change the course of the future.

We can raise our voices and extend our hands against the darkness of the world outside but it won’t do any good unless we also address the darkness within our own hearts. The gospel said: “John went throughout the whole region of the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.” John’s voice isn’t just calling us to raise our voices and extend our hands in the face of darkness and injustice, he is calling us to root out the darkness and injustices we harbor in our own souls. What are these obstacles in our spiritual lives which John is telling us to remove? What stands between us and Jesus? We need to find those valleys and mountains and remove them. The best place to start is by going to Confession and being mindful not just of the bad things we have done, but also thinking of opportunities for good and kindness that we may have missed.

John’s voice is crying out to us. He is calling out to us on behalf of the one who is coming after him—his cousin Jesus. Both are calling us to actively confront the darkness in and around us as we continue our journey towards Jesus. To help us through this rather scary stage of our adventure, next week, John is going to lead us to someone who wants to bring a bit of light into the darkness.

Saint John the Baptist, pray for us

*Delp, Alfred. (2006) Advent of the Heart. Ignatius Press. Pg 55