

# **A Bible Bullet (aimed at the heart)**

Second Sunday of Advent, Cycle B  
Isaiah 40:1-5,9-11; 2 Peter 3:8-14; Mark 1:1-8

As Advent begins, are you ready to tell others of the God of your faith? Have you found that the God whom you worship is at least slightly different from the God of your parents? Each of us has experienced God differently for each has experienced God in the events of our lives. The Scriptures and Traditions of our Church have spoken to us in voices woven through our lived experience. Imagine, then, how the people who gathered around John the Baptist pictured God as John spoke of a God who would baptize them in the Holy Spirit.

As we hear in the Gospel about John the Baptist calling the people to a baptism of repentance, we should realize that baptism was a ritual familiar to the Jewish people. If a Gentile wished to convert to Judaism he first had to submit to circumcision because that was the mark of the covenant people. Second, sacrifice had to be made for him because he stood in need of atonement and only blood could atone for sin. Third, he had to undergo baptism, total immersion, which symbolized cleansing from the evil for his past life. The amazing part about John was that he was asking Jews to submit to baptism. John had come to the understanding that to belong to God was not a racial privilege but a cleansing of the heart.

This baptism was to be accompanied by confession: confession to self to be aware of personal sinfulness, confession to those who have been hurt by the sin, and confession to God who deserves the humility of the person who seeks mercy.

If this baptism was not a typical ritual for a Jew, why did so many follow John? First, John lived true to the message he preached. He lived in the wilderness giving himself a chance to hear God speak to him as had so many prophets before him. Second, John had the

physical attributes of the Old Testament prophet, Elijah, who wore a coat woven of camel's hair and a leather belt around his waist. Third, he was not spoiled by the riches of life for even his food was that common to the wilderness. Commentators differ in their interpretations of locust. Some believe it to be grasshoppers. Others believe it was the locust bean produced by the carob tree, which was the food of the poorest of the poor of his day. It was sweet in taste and something like a nut. Fourth, the people had lived for four hundred years without prophets. They were hungry for the Word of God. Fifth, John gave the people **an irresistible message**. It told of something beyond them, a cleansing that was new, not just of water, but of the Holy Spirit that would cleanse their hearts.

As apostles of the Word, do we give witness to the message of Jesus so that others can relate to it? Is there truth in our personal advertising? In our actions? In our words? In our personal priorities? How many will come to believe in the Jesus we profess to model?

As the prophet Isaiah wrote:

In the desert, prepare the way of the Lord! Make straight in the desert a highway for our God! Every valley shall be filled in, every mountain and hill made low; the rugged land shall become level, and the rough places a plain. Then **the glory of God shall be revealed**, and all humankind shall see it together; for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.