

ADVENT PRACTICES

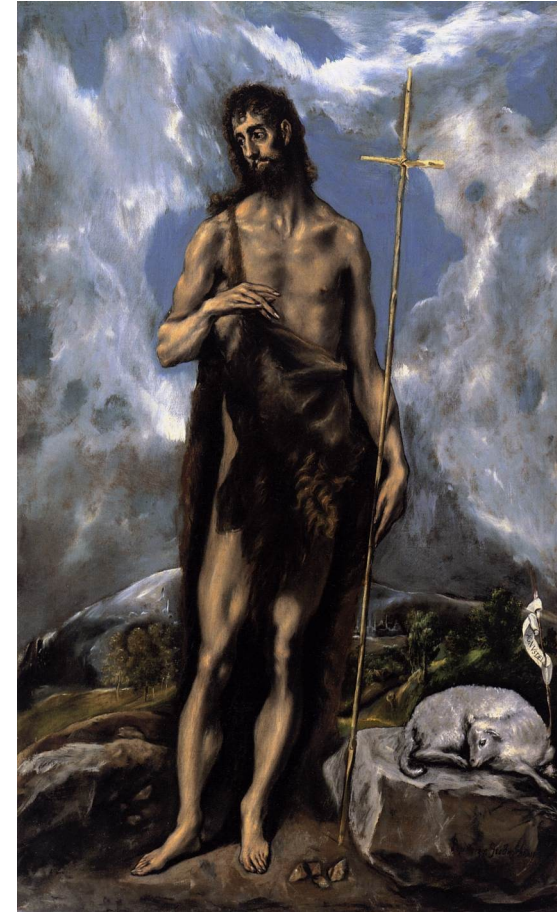
- 1) **Although not as demanding as Lent, Advent is still a penitential season: prayer, fasting and almsgiving really help our spiritual progress. I particularly encourage fasting a little especially from media.**
- 2) **Make a good confession.**
- 3) **Read some Scripture: the prophet Isaiah is a good Old Testament book to read.**
- 4) **Deepen our prayer life.**
- 5) **Have an Advent Wreath at home.**

Wishing you a very fruitful Advent season.

God bless, Fr. Dominic

A prayer for use during Advent, to coincide with the Reflection theme:
Enlarge your tent:

Coming Lord, every Advent we enter into this time of hopeful expectation. We prepare our hearts to welcome You once again at Christmas. We praise and thank You for seeking us, for leaving the glory of heaven and choosing to come to us. Help us to see that You continue to come to us in the most Blessed Sacrament and in the hearts of all our parishioners and visitors. Fill us with the Holy Spirit, so that we may have the courage and creativity to welcome and invite others into our parish family. Help us see how we can better work together to be a welcoming community that makes You present in word, action, sacrament and deed. So that all who enter our churches this Christmas and Advent season encounter Your love and invitation of friendship. May this begin with ourselves, that we feel renewed and joy filled by being a member of our parish community, so that we can be a beacon of hope in a broken world. We ask this in Your powerful name. Amen.



John the Baptist by El Greco

Dear Faithful

The second Sunday of Advent brings onto the scene the great and rather unsettling character of St John the Baptist which if we think about it, is a bit unusual. It seems as if we are skipping ahead and bypassing Our Lord's birth. What the Church is doing is teaching us how to prepare for the coming of the Lord and using the Baptiser as an example.

Let us consider a few important phrases from the gospels.



Firstly, notice that the word of God comes to John in the wilderness. This tells us two things:

a) God speaks most clearly and powerfully in the desert. This we can see throughout the bible; e.g. Moses and Elijah; Jesus in his temptations. This is because it is in the desert that there is no hiding, no pretending to be what we are not; it represents the bareness and humility with which we must go before God. There is no alternative to this solitude - which means not being alone (separate from other people) and therefore unpleasant but being ALONE WITH GOD. Henri Nouwen in his excellent book "The Way of the Heart" called it the furnace of transformation: "In a world that victimizes us by its compulsions, we are called to solitude where we can struggle against our anger and greed and let our new self be born in the loving encounter with Jesus Christ." (p.39/40)

It is a real struggle but it is one in which if we endure we shall see a real transformation in the depths of our very being: the heart. Lest we think that this is only for those with time and the ideal physical circumstances, we can all find this desert within our heart with desire.

b) John's greatness was his attentiveness to the word of God. The sentence implies that John has spent some time waiting for God to speak but when God speaks he gives John his instructions - his mission starts and originated in God's word. Most importantly this tells us that John was a man of prayer. Solitude must go along with prayer. There is a beautiful quote in the catechism CCC 2570 - "Such attentiveness of the heart whose decisions are made according to God's will, is essential for prayer." In other words, we cannot pray nor will our prayer do us any good unless we are first attentive with the heart which means open to and ready to obey whatever God commands us to do. In 2589 the catechism tells us that in this solitude and battle there will be a host of enemies but that we should "wait upon what the faithful God will do, in the certitude of his love and in submission to his will."

So often we pray and pray but nothing seems to change - there can of course be a variety of reasons for this but often it is because the soul is not open and ready to be submissive to God's will. However, sometimes when the soul is submissive, God is trusting in its patience and endurance.

Secondly, John's mission: "a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins."

a) John is the herald, he is announcing the coming of the Messiah who will baptise with the Holy Spirit. He is preparing the way by preparing the people to acknowledge their sinfulness and their need for redemption. He will point out to Andrew and John the Lamb of God. So he both prepares and points us to the Christ. It is of absolute significance that we are aware of our need for redemption - this is not just a one off event but the ongoing characteristic mark of the Christian. We see that the prostitutes and tax collectors listened to John, believed him and repented; whereas many others felt this was an insult and that they were not sinful. See Luke's description of the two types of prayer of the pharisee and the tax collector (Chp 18)

I love the way the Chosen handles this Season 3 Episode 3 "Physician heal thyself" Jesus tells his audience in the synagogue at Capernaum that unless they were able to admit their need of redemption, he could not save them. This is the repentance that John is calling us to - to acknowledge our need of a redeemer and that at every moment we are only kept holy by Jesus. There is a dangerous tendency today to see some sins as unforgivable and this is then used to lessen the gravity of our own sins. I wonder with whom Jesus would have dinner today.

b) Lastly an exhortation by St Anselm:

"Insignificant man, rise up! Flee your preoccupations for a little while. Hide yourself for a time from your turbulent thoughts. Cast aside, now, your heavy responsibilities and put off your burdensome business. Make a little space free for God; and rest for a little time in him.

Enter the inner chamber of your mind; shut out all thoughts. Keep only thought of God, and thoughts that can aid you in seeking him. Close your door and seek him. Speak now, my whole heart! Speak now to God, saying, I seek your face; your face, Lord, will I seek."

