



Isaiah 11:1-10

Psalms 72:1-2, 7-8,
12-13, 17

Romans 15:4-9

Matthew 3:1-12

Second Sunday of Advent

December 4, 2022



REFLECTION

John the Baptist presents a compelling figure. He appeared as a prophetic wild man, coming out of the desert, wearing camel skin and preaching the coming Messiah, and crowds gathered to hear and see him. Many came for baptism: some curious, some motivated by sincere piety, and some likely simply following the religious trend of the season.

When the Sadducees and Pharisees came to be baptized by John in the Jordan River, he saw through their external piety and called them out in strong terms. John accuses the Pharisees and Sadducees of being motivated only by fear of God's anger and tells them they must prove that they are sorry for their sins by changing their sinful, hypocritical ways. Repentance doesn't mean much if it doesn't lead to change!

It is not enough to just go along with a religious tradition without letting it change our hearts and guide our actions. It isn't enough to simply go through the motions of confession and repentance. A true change of heart must be reflected by true change in our lives.



ACTION

Baptism is the beginning of our faith life, it calls us to a lifelong relationship with God. Your baptism brought you into the family of the Church. How can you water the seeds of faith that were planted at your baptism? Do your actions reflect what you say you believe? Ask Christ to send the Holy Spirit to help you fill your actions this week with love.

“Confession is an act of honesty and courage.”

—St. John Paul II



? QUESTIONS

- ❖ What do today's readings teach you about the Christian life?
- ❖ What kinds of "good fruits" would you expect to see as evidence that someone was truly repentant?
- ❖ What are the differences between John's baptism and the baptism he says Christ will give?



December 4, 2022

SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT

LECTIONARY #4A

Isaiah 11:1-10

Psalms 72:1-2, 7-8, 12-13, 17

Romans 15:4-9

Matthew 3:1-12

Prepare for the Word

The following elements may be used by the catechist, teacher, or youth minister to prepare to facilitate today's session with teens. You may integrate this information into the reflection and discussion on today's readings.

Leader's Context

John the Baptist tells us to prepare the way for the coming of Christ through repentance. To genuinely repent requires more than going through the motions of saying sorry. There must be an acknowledgment of sin and a commitment to change. John's baptism with water marked each person's decision to turn their life around, turning away from sin and toward God. It is important to point out that John's baptism was not offering God's forgiveness of sins (which came later, through Christ and the Holy Spirit), rather John emphasized the significance of repentance in our preparation. Today, we can use an examination of conscience to honestly reflect and repent before seeking God's forgiveness in the sacrament of reconciliation.

Q FOCUS: *Repentance is an essential part of preparing ourselves for Christ's coming.*

Liturgical Calendar Connection

On December 6, we celebrate the memorial of St. Nicholas, a fourth-century bishop who witnessed both Roman persecution and the legalization and spread of Christianity. Little is known about his life, but his intercession is credited with many miracles, and legends of this popular saint abound. One tells of him slapping a heretic at the Council of Nicaea, while defending the divinity of Christ. Most well-known are the stories that recognize St. Nicholas as a generous gift giver who protects and loves children.

Celebrating and imitating his example of generosity is presumed to be where the contemporary Santa Claus finds its roots. Many families celebrate this feast day by leaving out shoes on December 5 for St. Nicholas to fill with small treats like coins, fruits, and sweets.

Church Teaching Connection

"In effect, to become reconciled with God presupposes and includes . . . doing penance in the fullest sense of the term: repenting, showing this repentance, adopting a real attitude of repentance—which is the attitude of the person who starts out on the road of return to the Father. This is a general law and one which each individual must follow in his or her particular situation. For it is not possible to deal with sin and conversion only in abstract terms" (*Reconciliatio et paenitentia*, 13).

Hear the Word

Use this resource, a Lectionary, or a Bible to proclaim the reading. The book should be held reverently or placed on a lectern. If possible, light a candle that is placed near where the Gospel will be proclaimed. Gesture for teens to stand.

Gospel Acclamation

Use the same musical setting that is used in your parish or at school Masses. Teens may help with music and proclaim the Gospel.

Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel

Matthew 3:1-12

Reader: A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew.

All: Glory to you, O Lord.

All make the Sign of the Cross on their forehead, lips, and heart.

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."

Reader: The Gospel of the Lord.

All: Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Everyone may be seated.

Reflect on the Word

When beginning the reflection and discussion about today's readings, first refer to the handout for today. Ask teens what they learned about themselves and about Christian discipleship from performing the action for the week and journaling. Ask teens about the readings of the day: What struck them? What do they think the readings mean? How do the readings affect their own lives? Then begin the following reflection:

► What does the expression "know your audience" mean, and why would knowing your audience matter?

For most of the next year, we will read from the Gospel of Matthew, who was writing for an audience that was primarily Jewish. This Gospel will use a lot of references from the Old Testament to help the Jewish audience come to the conclusion that Jesus is the Messiah they have been waiting for! John's odd

clothing choices matched those of the prophet Elijah, who also loudly criticized corrupt leaders and suffered for it, also preached in the desert, and also prepared the way for another who would come after him. To "prepare the way of the Lord," John preached a message of "repentance."

► How do you understand what it means to repent? Why would repentance be important?

The dictionary definition of repentance includes sorrow and remorse—which are essential—but the biblical understanding goes deeper than that. The Greek word used for repentance in the Bible is *metanoia*, which holds the connotation of "turning." As in, turning away from sin and turning toward God. The call to repentance is a call to self-examination; to examine the areas of your own life that need more turning away from selfishness and more turning toward goodness and love.

► Do you think most people's sins extend from selfishness? If not, what do you think they extend from?

John looked, sounded, and lived like the Old Testament prophets who foretold the coming of the Messiah. So his actions and words really made people think. As they acknowledged their sins, they sought the symbolic cleansing of John's baptism. Notice how John differentiates between the baptism he offers and the deeper, more profound baptism that Jesus will offer—with fire and the Holy Spirit. John's ministry prepares the people by inviting them to take the essential step of acknowledging their sins. Then, it is Jesus who offers God's actual forgiveness.

► Have you ever been on the receiving end of someone offering a mechanical apology—saying the words, but not really meaning it? How about the giving end?

► How can insincere apologies impact a friendship? How about within a family?

When John saw the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he saw people being fake instead of truly turning away from sin. The whole point of John's preaching and baptism was to prepare the people for the coming of God, which can only be done with integrity. Saying the right words and acting the

part might fool a lot of people, but it's not going to fool God.

Wrapping It Up

Consider these points to conclude the discussion and reflection. Integrate the thoughts and ideas that surfaced during the discussion as well as the "Church Teaching Connection" on page 76.

Repentance is a sincere and sorrowful meta-noia: turning away from sin and toward God.

Acknowledging sins and repenting is an essential part of preparing for God's coming.

Real repentance requires integrity; you can't fake it with God!

Act on the Word

Examination of Conscience

For this activity, you will need to create an atmosphere of private, personal reflection—either by moving to a sacred space or by lighting a candle, dimming the lights, and playing soft instrumental music. You will also need an examination of conscience for the young people; many versions can be found online. If you were not able to offer the sacrament of reconciliation for the Thirty-First Sunday in Ordinary Time activity, try to make that available during this time. Make arrangements with the pastor to offer the sacrament of reconciliation or prepare and distribute a list of times and places that the sacrament is available during the coming week.

Begin by explaining what an examination of conscience is: a reflection that helps us prepare for the sacrament of reconciliation by looking honestly and prayerfully at our actions, words, behaviors, and attitudes, as we think about how we may have (intentionally or unintentionally) hurt our relationships with God and others. This isn't about making people feel bad about themselves. Our loving and merciful God wants us to reflect so that we can repent and reconcile. God wants to heal broken relationships, which won't happen without our cooperation. This is something we need to do truthfully, with integrity. Remember, you can't fool God!

Many guided reflections use Scripture passages like the Ten Commandments or the beatitudes to pose questions: Have I done this? Or: Do I show respect for that? Answering these questions prepares us by opening our eyes so that we can acknowledge our sins and clearly identify the areas of our lives that need to be worked on. A good examination of conscience will prompt you to think about your relationship with God, your relationships with others, and how well you honor God through respecting your own body, mind, and soul.

Consider either printing and distributing an examination of conscience (the USCCB website offers several; www.usccb.org), or show the teens how to find one on their own. Have them take out their phones, and type "examination of conscience" into a search engine, and choose a resource that helps them reflect.

Conclude by providing the teens a quiet reflective atmosphere to actually do their examination of conscience and encouraging them to seek the sacrament of reconciliation afterwards, even if they have recently gone.

Closing Prayer

*God of renewal and hope,
you sent John the Baptist
to call us to change our lives
so that we might serve you in fullness.
Give us courage
to mend our ways
so that we may faithfully live out
our baptismal call.
Through Christ our Lord.
Amen.*

For Next Sunday

To help teens prepare for next Sunday's Mass, print, email, or share on a blog or social media the handout found on the next page. The JPG and PDF files are available at www.ltp.org/lwgr. Encourage teens to attend Mass with family or friends.