

Daily Reflections

ADVENT

The Divine Intervention

December 4, 2016

Scripture

Matthew 3:1-12

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."

Our Scripture Reflection

The people in Jesus's day were much like us in that they, too, wanted to get to Heaven someday. But they felt lost. Why? There were no good shepherds. The scribes and Pharisees with all of their rules and regulations, as well as their arrogant lack of mercy left the average person feeling directionless and hopeless. And then along came John the Baptist with his very simple and direct message: Repent! No wonder so many people flocked to him down in the Jordan. John, in his simplicity, was a sign of hope. For the Pharisees and scribes, however, he was an untrained and unsophisticated fanatic. No wonder they earned from John the title, "Brood of Vipers." They slithered around in their fancy attire living the way of hypocrisy and John would have none of it. John stood for Truth, Truth in living the spiritual life. May we this Advent season strive for the same.

Food for your Journey

In October 1989, the city of San Francisco was struck by a powerful earthquake. Huge cracks appeared in the walls of Candlestick Park, where thousands of fans were waiting to watch the third game of the World Series. Sections of freeway twisted and buckled; some collapsed. At least twenty-

seven fires broke out across the city; the largest, in the Marina District, consumed dozens of buildings.

At the edge of the Marina District, a crowd of curiosity-seekers gathered, watching the firefighters as they battled the flames. After a few minutes of this, a police officer came up to the crowd and began shouting at them. "What have you come to look at?" he said to them. "This is no time to be standing around. There's been an earthquake. You all have work to do! Go home. Fill your bathtubs with water (if you still have water). Prepare yourselves to live for the next several days without electricity. The sun's going to set in another hour; your time is running out. The firefighters will do their job here: Now you go home and do yours!"

That police officer spoke truth, as John the Baptist spoke truth. He spoke with urgency, as John the Baptist spoke with urgency. His message, like John's, was what the people truly needed to hear.

What's the message we most need to hear, in these ever-shortening days of Advent? Is it a message of spending and partying and conspicuous consumption? Or is it a message of repentance and forgiveness and faithfulness?

Repentance is the doorway to the spiritual life, the only way to begin. It is also the path itself, the only way to continue. Anything else is foolishness and self-delusion. Only repentance is both brute-honest enough, and joyous enough, to bring us all the way home.

--Frederica Mathewes-Green, *The Illumined Heart* (Touchstone, 2002).
frederica.com.

Prayer from the Heart

Dear Jesus, Help me this day to heed the call of John the Baptist. Please give me the Grace to turn my life around and back to You. Amen.