SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT - DECEMBER 7, 2025

Even though he's a central figure in the New Testament, there are really not many details about John the Baptist. However, there are some aspects of his personality and history that we can take from the little we know about him.

His parents were Zechariah and Elizabeth, who was a relative of Mary, the mother of Jesus. They were an elderly couple who never had children. Zechariah was a priest , and one day while serving in the Temple, the angel Gabriel announced to him that he would have a child named John. Because he doubted the angel's message, Zechariah was struck dumb and didn't speak again until the child was born. Because of the miracles surrounding his birth, everyone would have expected great things from this child.

Zechariah was a priest. So it would have been expected that his son, John, would also be a priest, since this office was passed down through family lines. However, that does not appear to be the path that John chose.

In those days, the Temple priests held a lot of authority and were well off. John could have had a very comfortable life for himself if he had followed in his father's footsteps. He could have lived in the desirable hill country around Jerusalem where he was raised, but he chose something quite different.

Instead of living in the hill country of Judea, he made his home in the caves of the wilderness. Instead of the fine linen robes that priests wore, he clothed himself in a camel hair garment held together with a leather belt. Instead of dining on red meat, he ate locusts and wild honey. And instead of sacrificing bulls, lambs, and pigeons in the Temple to forgive the sins of the people, he required something quite different. He stood at the banks of the Jordan River plunging people into the murky waters, and calling them to offer themselves as a sacrifice.

At the time that John the Baptist appeared on the scene, the Temple priests had become corrupted by power and money. John must have seen it for himself and decided that he wanted no part of it. He must have sensed that God wanted something more for him than a comfortable life serving in the Temple. He must have sensed that God also was preparing something greater for His people than just offering animal sacrifices.

At the same time, for John the Baptist to choose such a radical lifestyle, he must have had a strong desire in his heart to serve God in a total and radical way. He must have desired a more authentic way of living out his faith. And he found it by the banks of the Jordan River calling the people to renounce their sinful way of life.

John must have also sensed that, far too often, people were offering sacrifice for their sins, but not changing their lives. They were going through the motions, offering what the law prescribed for their sins, but without resolving to stop offending God and hurting their neighbor. John knew

in his heart that God wanted something more. So he found another way to call people to repentance - by not only confessing their sins, but also vowing to change their lives.

That explains John's strong language when the Sadducees and Pharisees show up to be baptized. He's telling them that they can't show up to his baptism with the same attitude they have at the Temple ceremonies. John would not allow them to go through the motions. They had to show that they were committed to repentance. Without that commitment to change, the waters of the Jordan river could not cleanse them and their status as children of Abraham could not save them.

Every year, we start Advent listening to John the Baptist's cry to repent and make straight the ways of the Lord. Like the people of his day, it is easy for us to just go through the motions. How many of us, at the beginning of Mass, when we are called to reflect on our sins, are instead thinking about what our plans for the rest of the week are. We might say the right words and beat our chest, but our minds and hearts are somewhere else. John the Baptist is speaking to us. Show fruits of repentance. Make a real change. That is what God is asking of us this Advent Season.

Why? Because God wants to be born in our hearts, just as truly as He was born in a stable in Bethlehem. He wants to visit us and make His home in us. If we are to give Him the welcome He deserves, we are going to want to cleanse ourselves not just with a little holy water or with some mindless, rote prayers, but with a firm purpose of amending our lives.

When John the Baptist preaches, it is with a sense of great urgency. He is preparing the way for someone else, someone mightier than he. This person will come as a judge who will separate the good from the bad. He will be able to tell who really wants to change from those who are simply going through the motions. This someone will baptize with fire. Unlike water that rolls off us and is incapable of changing us, fire marks us permanently and changes us forever.

That someone whom John the Baptist was preparing the people for was Jesus Christ. He showed us the way to the Father by making a total sacrifice of Himself on the cross. And He told us that if we are to be His disciples, we cannot settle for going through the motions. Rather we have to pick up our cross every day and renounce ourselves. They are strong words, but they are backed up by Jesus' death and resurrection.

So, let's not allow this Advent to be a time when we are just going through the motions to get to Christmas. Instead let us resolve to make some sacrifices during these weeks so that we can have an authentic change of heart. Only such a heart can welcome the fire that Jesus wants to set in is. Only such a heart can welcome the God who wants to make His home in us. And only such a heart can ever experience the true joy of Christmas.