

Straight from the ‘Fashion and Health’ Section

Second Sunday of Advent year B

Mark 1:1-8

Mark begins

- his sharing of the “good news”
- his *gospel*

by speaking of the preaching of John the Baptist.

It is somewhat understandable.

John the Baptist is the one who is chosen by God ultimately to “prepare the way of the Lord”.

We focus on John the Baptist, the one who prepared, during this time of *preparation of the Lord*.

But why John the Baptist?

Why was *he* chosen?

He is a very odd fellow, and so God surely has unusual taste.

In fact, although God is supposedly all-knowing,

I might venture to say, in looking at John the Baptist,

that there is one area in which God is *not* all-knowing: the art of public relations.

I mean, really!

John the Baptist was “**clothed in camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he fed on locusts and wild honey.**”

Why not someone

- with more serious credentials?
- who can run a slick campaign?
- with a little more class?
- who is more of a bridge-builder?

Why choose someone whom people would surely find an oddity?

Perhaps it is because the “good news” that John the Baptist announced was not a message but a *person*.

He prepared the way of *the Lord*.

And this person, Jesus the Christ,

does not really benefit from good public image tweaking

(like that which we must endure during presidential campaigning!).

Indeed, it is difficult to pinpoint Jesus in terms of *image*,

and, in a sense, there is no adequate preparation for him.

John the Baptist’s preparation was as adequate as can be.

He, in fact, prepares the way in very unique fashion.

He simply points the way ...and *disappears*.

He does not engage in convincing, apologetic discourse.

He proclaims a baptism of repentance,

which essentially disposes to a greater welcome of the Lord.

And so, John the Baptist is the *perfect* precursor.
He is a *docile instrument* in the hands of the One who comes.
He is totally *relative* to Jesus, and finds mysterious joy in such relativity.

It is actually quite interesting that his clothing and diet be mentioned.
Mark 1:6 is from the “fashion and health” section of his gospel!
John’s clothing, although strange to us, was that of a prophet.
Indeed, we see mention of it in Zachariah 13:4: prophets wore the “hairy mantle”.
And in 2 Kings 1:8, the servants of King Azariah bring to him a message,
and describe the messenger as
“wearing a hairy garment, with a leather girdle about his loins”,
in response to which the king exclaims, “It is Elijah!”.
John’s diet was that of the desert.
John the Baptist is the great prophet and servant, “Elijah”,
who points the way to intimacy with the God-man, the “desert”.

We celebrate John the Baptist because he is actively at work in our lives,
preparing the way of the Lord *in us*.
He does so primarily by enabling us to live what he did.
What does he exemplify and manifest so eloquently? *poverty of spirit*
John the Baptist is content to be “a voice crying the desert”.
Can you say *mysterious identity*?
He is *lost* in God—in the good sense of the term.
Love will do that.
He is so available that wonders are worked through him.
Hence the crowds.
Hence Jesus’ testimony to him (Luke 7):
**“What did you go to see in the desert?
A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet.
I tell you, among those born of women, no one is greater than John.”**

John would like to make us similarly available to divine love.
Let us beseech him and the Holy Spirit to

- open our hearts
- be honest about what in us is not surrendered to the Lord
- dare to hope no matter what may be happening in our lives

If we do, the freedom and joy of John the Baptist will be ours,
which is the freedom and joy of Jesus...