



My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

This week, we hear about John the Baptist. Scholars of the Dead Sea Scrolls tell us that the Essenes (the group that wrote and/or stored the Dead Sea Scrolls) formed John. The Essenes were a Jewish sect in the first century. The Bible talks about Pharisees and Sadducees, Scribes and Zealots, but does not speak about the Essenes, so we are not as familiar with them as the other groups. (For a good book about the Essenes and Jesus, read *Jesus and the Dead Sea Scrolls: Revealing the Jewish Roots of Christianity* by John Bergsma.) We may never hear about them in the Gospels because it seems that Jesus' teaching was very close (though not identical) to much of the Essene thought, so there would have been fewer confrontations between them and Jesus.

In any case, John seems to have been part of the sect of the Essenes (at least at one point in his life). The understanding of a Baptism of Repentance is certainly an Essene idea. John is calling out for *all* to repent – to turn back to God. The Church places this call before us on the Second Sunday of Advent to remind us of our need for repentance. As I mentioned last week in my homily, the theme of Advent is "*Maranatha* – Come, Lord Jesus!" We wait with expectation, we prepare, we cry out to the Lord, we beg for His coming. Part of our preparation is *repentance*.

Repentance means more than simply being sorry for our sins. Sorrow for sins is called "contrition." In our understanding, we look at contrition as being either perfect or imperfect. Imperfect contrition is when we are sorry for our sins because of the consequence of sin – we're afraid of Hell or losing Heaven, we're sorry for the effects of sin upon others or ourselves, we're sorry that *we* are imperfect and are ashamed to see our imperfect selves. Perfect contrition, on the other hand, is when we are sorry for our sins because they have wounded our relationship with God – because they hurt the One we love, the One who loves us more than anyone else loves us!

Repentance does include contrition, but it includes an "action plan" as well. Repentance means that we are changing our lives, turning away from sin. We not only are sorry for our sins, but we actively work to turn away from our sins and turn to God. I think of Matthew Kelly's talk "Don't Just Try... Train!" (there are still copies of this CD at the main entrance of the Church). He speaks about not just "trying" to change our lives, but doing the work that is needed to train for holiness.

One of the great helps we have in our repentance is the Sacrament of Reconciliation. In Reconciliation, we get coaching (remember, repentance means training), the grace of the Sacrament *perfects imperfect contrition*, and we hear with our ears that our sins are forgiven, thus we have an encounter with the merciful love of God. On top of this, the Sacrament of Reconciliation brings healing to the wounds in our soul, and with the worthy reception of Communion, can give us the strength to change our lives, truly repenting, truly preparing ourselves for the coming of Jesus.

Again, I strongly encourage you this Advent to take advantage of the incredible gift of God in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. This weekend, we have the Cluster Advent Reconciliation Service (Sunday, December 6, 2:00pm at Mary, Queen of Peace Church, 200 Lawrence Rd., Salem), I am available for Confessions on Wednesdays during Advent at 7:00pm, as well as before each of the weekend Masses. If none of these work, you can always call me and make an appointment, or contact another priest in the area for Confession.

This Advent, let's take the time really to prepare ourselves for Christ's coming, including repentance from sin, so we can cry out "*Maranatha* – Come, Lord Jesus!"