

Fr. Tim Ralston – Homily for December 11, 2011

Well, it's that time of the year again. And no, I'm not referring to the Christmas season, with all the shopping and decorating. No, I'm not even talking about the current season of Advent, with its traditional symbols like the Advent wreath. Rather, I'm talking about coming to the end of another calendar year, and with it, the seemingly endless barrage of lists highlighting what people and events are considered to be the best and the worst of this past year. Radio stations will count down the top songs, ESPN might look at the top stories in sports, and of course, Time Magazine is ready to name its Person of the Year.

This idea of having a "Person of the Year" always strikes me as being kind of silly. How can anyone believe themselves capable of choosing one person out of the 7 billion or so of us who live in the world for this honor? What are the criteria for choosing? Well, for the people at Time magazine, they'll say the person of the year is the person who has had the greatest influence on the events of this past year.

Well, if we were going to name someone as person of the Advent season, it seems that a leading candidate would be John the Baptist. For this is the second straight Sunday that John has been featured in the Gospel. But John, at first glance, would hardly stand out as someone of great influence, especially when looked at through our modern eyes. Rather, he might be seen as a religious fanatic, as an eccentric who, as we heard last week, lived in the desert, wore clothes of camel hair, and ate locusts and wild honey, all the while calling people to repent of their sins. This is not someone that most of us would be quick to follow or to whom we would give much attention.

During his own time, though, John the Baptist did garner a lot of attention. Many were coming to him to be baptized, and the religious leaders even came to find out who exactly he was. In doing so, they gave this man every opportunity to accept honors and titles even greater than being named "Person of the Year". They asked him if he was the Messiah, or Elijah, or The Prophet. John said no to all of this, though. He didn't want the focus on him; he didn't want the accolades. John simply stated that he was "the voice of one crying out in the desert." He was merely a voice.

However, that voice was proclaiming a great and important message. And that voice continues to ring out to us today as the Church bears witness to the importance of John the Baptist and especially of his message. We still hear his words, "Make straight the way of the Lord." John is still calling us to repentance. He is still exhorting us to be ready to meet Jesus and to welcome Him into our lives, even as he did in the desert 2,000 years ago.

This is what Advent is all about. Making the necessary preparations to meet Christ anew at Christmas. Preparing ourselves so that Christ may journey on a straight path to our hearts. Preparing ourselves to see the salvation of God.

These preparations include a strong commitment to our prayer life, approaching God every day with our joys, thanksgivings and praises, as well as our struggles, our concerns and our sins.

Our preparations include coming to Mass, on each Sunday and holy day, and perhaps more often, so that the Word of God may come to us as it did to John the Baptist.

Our preparations include making proper use of the Sacraments, especially the worthy reception of the Sacraments of the Eucharist and of Penance.

Our preparations include being men and women of love and generosity to all those around us, whether this is buying gifts and food for those who are less fortunate, helping someone clean their home before visitors come over, or even inviting someone who has left the faith to come to Mass with us.

These preparations, along with many others that could be mentioned, will help us to better avoid the headaches and distractions we often find in this season. Instead, we will be able to focus on the reality of the celebration of Christ's birth in the world and in our hearts.

Because, when it comes down to it, it is the coming of Christ into our lives that is the single greatest event year in and year out. This is why John the Baptist is so important, and so influential, especially during this Advent season. And this is why he would be a leading candidate for Person of the Advent season. If we tried to give him that honor, though, I'm sure he would refuse. He would say, "It's not me. There is another who is coming, much greater than me." And we know that he is right. Because without a doubt, it is Jesus Himself who is not just the "Person of the Advent Season" or "The Person of the Year", but rather, "the Person, and the God, of Eternity."