

## **The Inclusive Community**

### **Second Sunday of Advent**

**Sunday, December 7, 2008**

#### **“The Good News”**

**Mark 1: 1-8**

#### **Homily of Anthony Padovano**

**Mark is the only Gospel writer who called his book a “Gospel”. It is “Good News.” Later, the word Mark uses will be the name all the lives of Jesus is given, a Gospel.**

**Mark makes it clear that we need three things before this story of Jesus can be really good news for us. We need:**

- 1. to prepare ourselves**
- 2. to purify our hearts**
- 3. to get the road right:**

**One might say we need a GPS that works before we get a Gospel, a Mapquest that Mark will use to mark the road to take**

**Let us set the scene for today’s Gospel and then take up the three themes I just mentioned: preparation, purification, directions to the right road.**

**The scene is quite dramatic. Jesus was crucified some 45 years ago and there has been no written account of his life. Mark is the first to write the story.**

**Mark does not begin with the birth of Jesus or the parents or the early years. He will give us only the last year in the life of Jesus. He begins, furthermore, with a stranger, someone Jesus never met, a young preacher in the wilderness who is also in the last year of his life, not a kinsmen of Jesus as Luke seeks to tell it he was (he was not) but a mysterious, tragic, charismatic figure named John.**

**John is a prophet. He dresses like one (rough, camel’s hair tunic); he eats wild honey, a sign of a prophet; he tells us he is not the point of his own preaching but only a pointer to someone to come later, soon, someone so much better than he is that he is not worthy to even be that person’s slave, untying his sandals, which was always a slave’s task.**

**John gets large crowds. Crowds always come out when people are desperate but also hopeful that the one they come to see can show them the road out of their troubles.**

**John tells them that they must do two things:**

- **confess their sins; give up their bad past; seek forgiveness. But we all know that forgiveness is not enough. It is not enough if your spouse forgives you. As we are forgiven, we are also asking whether there will be a life for us with the person who just forgave us. If the spouse who forgives, no longer wants us or the parent who forgives no longer accepts us, the forgiveness still breaks our heart.**

**John the Baptist asks people to seek forgiveness and to wait for the next step, the next person who is to come.**

- **the second task John gives is to be baptized. But baptism is never enough. Baptism raises the question as to whether there will be community after it. Birth is not enough, after all. Every birth raises the question of whether or not someone will take us in as a son or daughter.**

**And so our description of this opening scene gives us a prophet who knows his limits. The point of a GPS or Mapquest is to get out of the way once the destination is reached. John is a GPS to Jesus. He never forgets that.**

**Now that we have the scene let us look at our three points; preparation, purification and roads.**

**First, preparation**

**The point of all preparation is an act of hope. We prepare for a guest or the return of a son or daughter as a day of celebration because we have hope that the guest or the child or the festivity will bring us new life, a second chance, a better future.**

**John says “prepare” because something exciting and deeply meaningful is about to happen.**

**Do you ever notice that when people are depressed, they stop preparing for anything, they look forward to nothing?**

**Second, purification**

**Purification is a break with the demons and darkness of the past. But we never break with our past unless we see a better future.**

**A depressed person always lives in the past. Purification is another name for hope. I give up something bad in my past because I no longer need it or want it.**

**Everyone in love gives up all that was less meaningful in the past and runs into the future. You cannot be in love without purifying yourself from the lesser past you had.**

**Third, what about roads?**

**John says, make the roads right. Find the right road. Make it level. Make it work. Every road is a symbol of hope.**

**Do you ever notice that in fairy tales, there are no roads where the wicked witch or the wolf or the monster lives? The evil presence is not on a road but in a dark forest where there is no way out. Once there is a road, we get a future.**

**In the Middle Ages, there were very few roads and they generally had no names. A GPS would not have worked. We build so many roads in contemporary life because we have hope for a better future. You did not need Mapquest in the thirteenth century because there were no roads to take or only one at best. With lots of roads, you need directions because all of them lead somewhere and take you into the future.**

**So, it is Advent. We must prepare and purify and get on the right road. Three ways of saying we must have hope.**

**John the Baptist is in the wilderness. The next verse, after today's passage, verse nine, has Jesus appear, on the road from Nazareth to the Jordan. People will most often find Jesus, later, on the road. On the road to Emmaus after Easter. On the roads St. Paul travels. On the roads from Nazareth to Jerusalem. On the road with the Magi or the Prodigal Son or the Good Samaritan.**

**You do not need a GPS to find Jesus now because there is so much hope. Jesus is on so many roads.**

**John the Baptist tells us today, we cannot get lost anymore. There is hope everywhere. All the roads lead to Jesus. Just get ready: prepare, purify and wait.**

**The good news is that Jesus will find us on all the roads of our lives. We will never be lost. If we catch the Gospel message, we know that all the roads are safe. All the roads lead home. All the roads have God waiting for us somewhere.**

**The story people tell of the farmer in Vermont who tells an inquirer you cannot get there from here is not a Gospel story. The Gospel tells us any "here" can get you "there" because Jesus has opened all the roads and made them safe for us. They all take us home.**