

December 9, 2019 Second Sunday in Advent

Monday is our penance service for Advent, many different priests will be here. Tuesday morning after the 8:30 Mass, I will be here as long as people come for confession in the morning, so if you don't like to drive at night or can't make it Monday night, I'll be here on the 11th Tuesday and the following week, Wednesday the 19th I will be here in the confessional in the morning after the 8:30 Mass. So if you want to come in those times, you can.

Why did John the Baptist take his shoes off before going in the water? He wanted to save soles. I got that out of the Boy Scout magazine. Do you want another one?

A teenage boy had just passed his driving test and inquired of his father as to when he could access the car. His father said, "Well son, I'll make a deal with you. You bring your grades up from "C" to "B" average, study your bible and cut your hair and then we'll talk about use of the car." The boy thought about it and finally shook with his father and agreed to it. About six weeks later his father came to him and said, "Son, you brought your grades up and I've been noticing you've been reading your bible, but you still haven't cut your hair." The son said, "Dad you know I've been thinking about this and reading the bible and you know, Samson had long hair, John the Baptist had long hair, Moses had long hair, and there's evidence that Jesus had long hair." His dad looked at him and said, "Yes, they walked everywhere."

Our second week of Advent, we have John the Baptist, no matter what happens, the second week of Advent John the Baptist is here. As a matter of fact, as I was praying the breviary last night, I noticed the dioceses of Africa changed some of their responses to make sure they were aware that John the Baptist has arrived. He was a very important person. So we get a reading from Luke. Now Saint Luke was a great writer in Greek. Greek was his first language and he was educated so when you read Luke's gospel in Greek it's actually poetic, it's very well written. Whereas if you read the gospel of Mark, which is the shortest one, you realize that he had learned Greek as a second or third language so it's very difficult the way he put it down. So we actually get to read from Luke, this Church year is the year of Luke. Luke is writing a biography, a biograph of Jesus and Luke is writing it in the way they did back then. We write biographies different today than they did 2,000 years ago. Two thousand years ago they wanted to situate the person in the flow of history, that this person actually existed in the flow of history. Luke kind of twisted it on its head because he does something incredible. Now he says in the fifteenth year of the reign of the Emperor Tiberias of the Roman Empire, Pontius Pilate was Governor of Judah, we know who he is, Brother Phillip – John the Baptist is going to have it out with him pretty soon, and then Lysanias and Herod, we know Herod. These guys are all government officials and they're high government officials. For this area of the world, they're situated in the secular stars and celebrities. And then he says, the priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas; now he's situating it in the Church, the Church and secular world because we know Annas and Caiaphas and we see those later on in Jesus's passion and death. People would have said, okay that's great, that's a good way to start a biography, they'd said, well written Luke. Then he does something different, he says, "And then the word of God came to John, the son of Zachariah, in the desert." Everybody's mouth would have dropped, they'd have gone, "What!" Because you just threw in an unknown person. Nobody knew who this guy was. It's like saying in the second year in the reign of Donald Trump, in the seventh year of the reign of Francis the Pope, you know Jose down in Guadalajara, got a pumpkin. They would have said, "Why did you do that?" Luke is doing this because he's not only situating Jesus in the world history, he's situating Jesus in theological, spiritual, Church

history, spirituality and the supernatural. So by doing that, Jesus becomes real but also, He becomes the Messiah. He's situated with the old testament and John the Baptist, the same way. The only time you see this phrase, "The word of God came to..." It's a prophet; Isaiah, Baruch, Jeremiah, those guys. It always says, "The word of God came to..." It means it's a prophet. So not only is he situating Jesus in the spiritual legacy of the people; he's situating John as a prophet. And Jesus will give His okay to that later on. But he says, "I'm coming to proclaim repentance for the forgiveness of sins. Now, repentance comes from a Greek word, metanoia, which means reverse direction. If you're going the wrong way you turn around. So if you're going the wrong way morally, you turn around. If you're going the wrong way in sinfulness, turn around. If you're going the wrong way anyway, turn around. If you're not sure you want to marry that person, turn around, go the other way, run, because if you don't know, don't do it. So, we have this turning around. But John is coming to the people and saying, "Turn your lives around, don't do what you've been doing, turn it around." And it went really really well because the people realized, "Yes, we haven't had a prophet in hundreds of years so we didn't know which direction to go. Now we have a prophet, we know which way to go." John tells them the same thing that every prophet has said, "Prepare the way of the Lord, lower the hills, fill in the valleys." When you have to drive today and it's all hilly, like when you go through Missouri through the Ozarks, it's all hilly and you're playing tag and switch around with semi's because they want to speed up and then they want to slow down and you're going around them. It gets frustrating, you can't use your cruise control. It's the same thing walking; these people would have had to walk up and down the hills, windy roads, and they'd get frustrated because it takes too much energy to go from point A to point B. They want a straight level road, they don't want to go winding around the mountain passes and all of that. The average person couldn't do anything about it, but when an important person like, Herod or Tiberius Caesar wanted to go somewhere, and this is what the Romans are noted for, they took the hills and filled in the valleys, they made a new road to get rid of the curves, they wanted a straight road. So if you look at any Roman road, build in that period of time, it's straight and it's level, and most are still in use today. You would see that. All the prophets are saying, "You know what? God is greater than these people. God wants a straight way, God wants a level surface in which to interact with you and me." He wants an easy way to get into our hearts to show us the way we need to go, so if we need to make a U-turn, we make a U-turn. This is in all different aspects of our lives. But you know the world doesn't want us to have a level road, it doesn't want a straight road. It wants to curve and wind up and mess up the truth. It wants us to go up and down and up and down. You know that if somebody's going up and down and up and down, their focus goes away from where they need to be. Just look at the news and see, "Donald Trump tweets!" Guess what happens. Everyone's upset – they're up here. Then, somebody else does something and they get away from Trump and they go back down. Then, Donald Trump tweets again! Whoosh, back up. So we're going up and down and up and down and they haven't figured that out yet. As a disclaimer: Father Branson reserves the right to criticize all politicians of any ilk. When he does that we all go up and down and up and down, so what's happening? Things are happening behind the scenes that we don't pay attention to because the media focuses on the ups and downs. Now if we had a level surface, we wouldn't have to do that. We wouldn't go up and down, all this kind of thing, we wouldn't get angry, we wouldn't get upset. And that's what God is saying, that's what John is saying: "Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight the roads, take the valleys and the hills, make them level so that God can come in and you stay level." If you realize God is in control, God is the Lord of your life, then what Donald Trump, Nancy Pelosi, any of those people do, doesn't matter. Yes, we're concerned but it's not the greatest tragedy in our lives, because we're working on our immortal souls. We're looking at eternal life and we

need to be focused there and if God is inside, then an atomic bomb goes off and we're, "Okay, it wasn't nice but I'm still looking forward to eternal life. So John is trying to get everybody to realize, "You know what? Let God come into your lives." We as human beings tend to do something that's really strange. We make small things big: mountains out of molehills. And big things, we tend to minimize them or underestimate them because we don't want to feel guilty, we don't want to make somebody feel bad. Yet, it's wrong. We do that with our own lives with sin. People will come to the confessional and they'll just go on and on about, "Father, I was mean to this person." And it's a big thing for them and then later on in the confessional, "Oh and by the way, I missed Mass on Sunday and I hit my husband upside the head with a frying pan." And they've got that down here in the valley. They have it wrong. Confession evens it out because now we're sorry, it's no longer an issue and now God can come into our hearts. So we need to stop doing that because that's what's wrong with society: they minimize immorality, they minimize illegality, they minimize the wrong things. Then they make mountains out of stupid stuff and we get all caught up in that. We have to realize, if we level it out with confession, with reading scripture, with prayer, taking frequent sacraments, then life doesn't bother us as much. We can live life without being so stressed out, without being so up in arms all the time. As we used to say while I was being raised in the military, "Always on red alert, def con one!" We don't want that. We want to be able to be calm and cool. Also, we get that way by building a road that Jesus can come into our hearts and be able to help us maintain that tranquility, that peace, but also get the most graces we need to make it to eternal life.

God bless you.