**3rd SUNDAY OF ADVENT [14th December, 2014]**

READINGS: Isaiah 61:1-2, 10-11/ 1 Thess. 5:16-24/ John 1:6-8, 19-28

THEME: JOHN: A MODEL OF PREPARATION FOR THE LORD’S COMING

By Very Rev. Fr. John Louis ([http://frlouis.com](http://frlouis.com/))

John the Baptist is a central figure in the period of Advent. We read about him last Sunday (Mark 1:1-8) and he features in today’s gospel reading as well. In both gospel readings, he is presented as the one who came **to prepare the way** for the Lord Jesus Christ. John was largely successful in preparing others to receive Christ, because he was well prepared himself. He went through three levels of preparations: by God, by his parents and by himself.

**PREPARATION BY GOD**

John’s conception and birth were to be so special that the mother’s womb remained barren until God decided to bring John into the world. It was as if God planned that no one else was to use the ‘room’ (Elizabeth’s womb) reserved for the great prophet. Thus, destined to carry out a special mission, John was conceived when his parents (Zechariah and Elizabeth) least expected it (Luke 1:5-25). Another point indicating that God prepared the Baptist is the fact that it was the angel Gabriel who announced the name ‘John’ – a name unusual in his family – even before he was born (Luke 1:13, 60-61). Thirdly, even before John was conceived, God had designed that he would never take wine or strong drink and he would be filled with the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:15).

John was, however, not the only one God prepared before his birth. Though an angel was not there to audibly announce to our parents about our birth, the truth is that God knew when each of us was coming into the world and he assigned everyone a mission. For all of us, there is a common mission: to know, love and serve God, and to love our neighbour as ourselves. Besides this general mission, we may grow to know our special mission through parents, communities, our interests and our abilities.

When the prophet Jeremiah wanted to run away from his mission, he was told: ‘Even before I formed you in the womb I have known you; even before you were born I had set you apart and appointed you a prophet to the nations’ (Jer. 1:4-5). This applies not only to Jeremiah and John but to all of us. God prepared each of us in a special way before we were even conceived: ‘it was you [Lord] who formed my inmost being and knit me together in my mother’s womb.… Even my bones were known to you when I was being formed in secret’ (Psalm 139:13-15).

**PREPARATION BY PARENTS**

We could sum up how Zechariah and Elizabeth prepared John as follows:

* They ensured that the name given by the angel was given to their child.
* They trained John to know how he was born and the divine mission entrusted to him.
* They trained him to know the scriptures, to be submissive to the Spirit of God, and to be committed to his mission.

Like Zechariah and Elizabeth who prepared John for his mission, all parents have the duty to prepare their children for their missions. Like Zechariah and Elizabeth, parents have to bring up their children to know, love and serve God; in this regard, teaching their children the ‘fear’ of the Lord is to lead them on the path of enduring wisdom. Secondly, through ensuring that their children have a sound education, paying close attention to their well-being and interests, and helping them identify their talents, parents play their due role in preparing their children for their future mission of contributing to society, to the glory of God. It is, therefore, sad that some parents (often fathers) neglect even the basic duties of the upkeep and education of their children. Worse still some men deny responsibility for the conceptions of their children.

**PERSONAL PREPARATION**

John went to the desert to prepare himself through prayer, fasting, and other forms of asceticism; by so doing he submitted himself to the Spirit of God (Luke 1:80). Secondly, he led a simple life seen by his place of abode, dressing and the type of food he ate. Thirdly, no strong drinks ever touched his lips and no razor touched his hair.

As John crowned the preparations by God and his parents by his own preparations, so we all have to do likewise. To foster the fulfillment of our general mission of knowing, loving and serving God, we have to, like John, regularly pray and meditate on the Word of God, practice penance, and embrace a lifestyle pleasing to the Lord. Secondly, to fulfill our specific mission, we should identify our vocation by assessing and using our interests and talents in ways that bring authentic development to society, to the glory of God. If, for instance, one identifies his/her vocation to be a lay person and teacher, he/she should constantly develop him/herself and teaching skills such that his/her students get the best he/she can offer. In this way, he/she contributes his/her quota towards the authentic development of society, to the glory of God.

CONCLUSION

Through the intercession of John the Baptist,

* May we appreciate ever more God’s investment in us;
* May every parent be more responsible for his/her child’s good upbringing and solid preparation for the future; and
* May we be constantly committed to fulfilling our general and specific missions. Amen!