

On a wall of an airport garage someone wrote this Advent text; “The Lord is coming SOON.” Rev 22: 7 SOON is in bold capital letters. Beneath this verse someone added, “Not if he is coming on this airline. “

John the Baptist is another matter, who burst forth from the desert. John the Baptist is a familiar part of Advent along with the Advent wreath, Christmas music in the stores, get-togethers with family and friends, all the features that make up our Advent season.

By contrast to this mood of warm cheer, though, John the Baptist appears in the desert calling us to repent because the Lord is near.

Most of us probably prefer the warm and peaceful picture Isaiah draws in today’s first reading, “the wolf will be the guest of the lamb, and the calf and the young lion will walk together with a little child to guide them.” It is a picture of Paradise, but not reality.

Enter John the Baptist dressed in camel’s hair saying to the Pharisees, “You brood of vipers. Who told you to run away from the wrath to come? Prove that you mean to reform.”

That is not the kind of message we find on commercial Christmas cards or those Hallmark television specials at this time of year.

True, but it is important that we have John the Baptist at this time of year.

Some might say that John the Baptist can take all of the fun out of Christmas. No, I think that it is John's message that directs us to experience the real and deeper meaning of Christmas. For it is his message that calls us not to the way that Christmas is, but that the way Christmas ought to be.

The path can be difficult, but worth effort. After all, can we know the real joy of salvation if we feel no need of being saved? Many people want a Christmas without Advent, an Easter without Lent, happiness without sacrifice, peace without justice, or heaven without conversion of life.

John’s message is simple: The more we turn away from Christ the more enslaved we become to the power of sin. The more we turn to Christ, the freer we become from the bondage of sin.

He reminds us that this is not just a holiday season but also a time to renew ourselves in the power and grace of Jesus Christ.

+Perhaps we all have met someone like John, perhaps even a relative, who says or does things that make us squirm uncomfortably and wish we were someplace else, because we know it is true.

Repentance means that one can start over and thus reshape our future.

For those who really listened to John's wake-up call, his message wasn't that you're doomed; you're condemned or you're going to hell.

His message was: You can start again; things aren't hopeless. The past cannot be erased, it cannot be made to disappear, but it can be refashioned, it can be "healed".

The old stump of Jesse's family seemed exhausted yet new life came from it. In our generation (Or your generation), the past does not have to decide our future. That is John's message for us today is to:

Ask forgiveness from God; in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Ask forgiveness from the person whom we have hurt or offended. Make room in our lives and our hearts for God

+Someone once said that, "the person who never changes; never mends."

During our lives, each of us is blessed with countless opportunities and chances to improve; to change. To decide our future by how we act today.

+A builder and contractor had worked together for many years. The contractor said to the builder, "Frank, I know you are getting ready to retire, but it would be a great favor to me if you would build one more house."

Frank did not want to build the house, but he finally relented and agreed to build the house, but his heart and mind were not in the job. He used some inferior materials. He cut corners.

Finally, when the house was completed, the contractor stood in front of the new house with Frank and his wife. The contractor then turned to Frank and handed him the keys to the house, saying, "Frank, this is my gift to you for your friendship and all your years of faithful service."

Advent challenges us to not compromise our future. Advent calls us to celebrate what we want to be, what we can be - with Christ in our lives.

+ As Charles Dickens put it, "The more important thing is this to be ready at any moment to sacrifice what you are for what you could become."

Repentance also means giving of oneself (or dying of the self) and letting go that which holds us from a deeper relationship with God.

We are all God's children and blessed with unique gifts and special talents. Each of us is a one-of-a-kind blueprint, created in the image of God.

Advent calls us to share our blessings with others and to be willing to make some sacrifices in life we will find a deeper meaning in life. (And beyond the sentimental Christmas.)

A number of our volunteers are exhausted because many seem unwilling to go deeper with their faith, to let go of certain comforts and thus experience the fullness of Christmas. We need to move beyond those blueprints and build something beautiful with our lives in this parish.

As St. Augustine said, "Perhaps God is trying to give you something, but He cannot, because your hands are full."

That is a timely image in this season when shoppers have their arms loaded, our credit cards are maxed out and our holiday schedule is crammed full.

Perhaps God is trying to give you something, but He cannot, because your hands are full with the wrong things, with things that perish, things that get in the way of the Lord coming into our hearts. After all, we are the innkeepers of our own hearts.