

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

In this Sunday's Gospel, St John the Baptist arrives on the scene, as it were. St Luke, with his list of names at the beginning of this third chapter, situates the beginning of John's preaching in an historical context, marking this moment as an important point in history. As we shall see when we come to Christmas, he uses the same technique to situate the birth of Jesus Himself.

The Baptist is, as it were, a new Isaiah. He uses Isaiah's words, since that prophecy pointed the way to the coming of the Saviour. The Baptist's task is clear. He is called to prepare the people for the ministry of Christ. This preparation demands repentance, for the people are not ready to receive the One who is to come.

So with us. We too must prepare for the coming of Christ. We do this in two senses; preparation for the great feast of the birth of the Word made Flesh, and for his coming again. This second sense might be daunting – but preparation is as necessary for us, as it was for those who listened to John the Baptist.

Advent focuses our minds and hearts on the coming of Christ, whom we await in hope. Advent is a time of joyful expectation, and this joy will be all the more profound if we use this time to be completely honest about our relationship with God, and our living out of the Gospel.

Let us take the opportunity that is given to us to return to the Lord, along the way that has been prepared for us – the way of repentance and the Sacrament of Reconciliation. This encounter with the all-merciful God, who sent His son to be our salvation, will bring us to a joy so deep that we shall be ready for the Lord when He comes – and be ready, too, for the celebration of His birth.

With every blessing,

+Richard

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