

Today's Gospel tells of the preaching, clothing and actions of John the Baptist. John said,

- Repent
- The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand

The prophet Isaiah spoke of John as

- A voice crying in the desert
- Prepare the way of the Lord.

We might ask, why does the Gospel point out that John's clothing was of camel hair. I suspect that camel's hair is pretty rough and coarse. Whether worn inside or out, it has to seriously chaff the skin. We rarely, if ever, see or hear such self-inflicted penance on anyone today.

Perhaps, we do not see a value in self-inflicted penance or mortification. Yet Jesus expects fasting (He said "when you fast..." Matthew 6:16). He praised John the Baptist (which had to include his preaching and life style.)

If we had total control our of self-indulgence, and self-seeking, we would probably not need such acts of penance and mortification. The meaning of mortification comes from the Latin "to make dead". By mortification we try to "make dead" (or at least lessen) the base tendencies that we all have. Whether we are prone to anger, pride, over-indulgence in so many diverse ways, backbiting, gossiping and so much more, we need to do whatever we can to control, lessen and eliminate those tendencies.

Certainly, mortification and acts of penance do help. It also shows our repentance.

When John says the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand, we would like to know exactly what he meant. Certainly, we do not see the Kingdom of Heaven, nor do I believe his contemporaries did either. My best understanding of the Kingdom of Heaven is the presence of Jesus Christ. He definitely was present in the time of John and we know He said He would be present till the end of time. "I am with you always". (Matthew 28:20)

John's job was to prepare the way of the Lord. It is no less a job for us. Prepare the way of the Lord for ourselves and for all those around us. What does it mean to prepare the way of the Lord? The most logical meaning is to prepare for Him to come. Prepare for Him to come within us. The whole purpose of Advent is to prepare to celebrate His first coming as well as to be prepared for His second coming.

Prepare the way of the Lord. Imitate John the Baptist. He certainly did by his life style, preaching and actions.