

**Second Sunday of Advent  
December 7, 2008**

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**Readings: Isaiah 40:1-5, 9-11; 2 Peter 3:8-14; Mark 1:1-8**

**Inspiration for homilies sometimes comes from the strangest places. Today is a good example. As I was pondering what to say, especially in light of the gospel's introduction of John the Baptist today, I quite accidentally came across the title of a new book. I actually could not believe my eyes. It was called *The Diet of John the Baptist*. Sometimes truth is stranger than fiction!**

**Wearing my academic hat, I assumed that this must be someone's doctoral dissertation rather hastily thrown together for some obscure German publishing house. So I had to find out more. What I discovered frankly shocked me. It may, indeed, be a doctoral dissertation, but it is also an award winning book published by one of Germany's most prestigious academic houses.**

**Now I was really curious. And lo and behold, I found out that the author is no lightweight laboring in some obscure outpost of post-secondary education in Slovenia. But the author is a faculty member at, of all places, a Jesuit University in Saint Louis. And one of the awards the book won is the**

***Alpha Sigma Nu International Jesuit Honor Society first place prize for Jesuit faculties in theology for 2008.***

***The Diet of John the Baptist.* It tells you much more than everything you have ever wanted to know about locusts and wild honey. Two chapters are devoted to the socio-historical meaning of grasshoppers as human food. There is a chapter on the meaning of John's diet in eschatological terms. And finally, the author, Professor James Kelhoffer, suggests that John's diet is really intended as a model for Christians to emulate. As I continued my on-line research thanks to even more powerful search engines, I found that someone has taken the Professor's last suggestion quite literally. I found a site dedicated to the "John the Baptist diet" as a lifestyle to promote healthier living in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.**

**As I said, truth is often stranger than fiction. Or, as the old line goes: you can't make this stuff up!**

**John the Baptist is surely one of the strangest figures in the New Testament. Always living in the shadow of his cousin, Jesus; constantly a counter-cultural and enigmatic sign for his contemporaries; eternally "simple" in his vocation. He simply points with his perhaps bent and craggy finger and says "Behold." There is the one. Don't miss him! That's all John**

does is point.

**Isaiah paints some of the most beautiful and poetic images in all the Hebrew scriptures. He celebrates the messiah, the anointed One, coming into human history as no other. Hills and valleys are leveled. Winding and crooked highways are made straight. And God comes with power to sing comfort to God's people. This is the first Advent. Here comes Emmanuel; God is with us.**

**Peter's letter today reminds us again of the second Advent, the second-coming of Emmanuel. Everything is to be dissolved and all the elements of our world are to be melted in a consuming fire. This is the second, eschatological Advent. For this too, we wait.**

**But there still stands John in today's gospel. It is a haunting image of a craggy man wearing camel's hair and eating locusts and wild honey. And all he does is point! He points right over there...and there. He points into our everyday world and says, simply: Behold! There is the Lamb of God!**

**John is the herald of the present Advent, the one you and I miss at our peril this Advent season. Jesus is still waiting to be born, to be discovered here and now, in your life and mine. For Thomas Merton this "present" Advent, or the "third" Advent, if you will, was the most important of all. He**

**says we have to “learn to recognize the present Advent that is taking place at every moment in our own earthly lives as wayfarers. We [need to] awaken to the fact that every moment of time is a moment of judgment, that Christ is passing by and that we are judged by our awareness of His passing. If we join Him and travel with Him to the kingdom, the judgement becomes for us salvation. But if we neglect Him and let Him go by, our neglect is our condemnation.”**

**There is no little baby waiting to be born again (despite our preparations for His birthday bash at Christmas.) There are no more shepherds, or angels, or cribs; there is no softly falling snow, nor any heraldic music. And we have yet to see the king returning in apocalyptic glory. For that we still wait. But there is John the Baptist standing there and pointing. Behold! Right there in the here-and-now of everyday life. There is Christmas waiting to become incarnate again.**

**Jesus is waiting: hungry and thirsty, naked and in prisons, sick and lonely. As we find Him in the least of his family members, we find Him born again every Christmas.**

**John is a strange and enigmatic man. The more we get to know him, his diet is, perhaps, the least strange thing about him. Truth *is* stranger than**

**fiction. And John's finger points unerringly at Truth.**