

December 7 – Second Sunday of Advent
Prepared by Rev. Joseph R. Veneroso, MM, Maryknoll NY

Isaiah 40:1-5, 9-11	A voice cries out: In the desert prepare the way of the LORD! Isaiah 40:3
Psalms 85:9-10, 11-12, 13-14	Kindness and truth shall meet; justice and peace shall kiss. Psalm 85:10
2 Peter 3:8-14	We await new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. 2 Peter 3:13
Mark 1:1-8	John was clothed in camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist. He fed on locusts and wild honey.

Teaching a Bible study class in Korea some years ago, I mentioned how John the Baptist survived in the desert eating locusts (a kind of grasshopper) and wild honey. The purpose of the passage was to underscore that John relied totally on God and did not depend on Jerusalem, its Temple or its politics. This point, however, was lost on one of my students who reacted with revulsion. “Eww,” he exclaimed with disgust. “I hate wild honey.”

I'd forgotten that some Koreans regard roasted grasshoppers as a delicacy. Quite tasty, too, I might add. John the Baptist's diet showed a complete rejection of the establishment. Freed from any connection to organized religion or political parties, such as the Herodians, John could call things as he saw them. Religious leaders may have been appalled, but the people reacted with enthusiasm.

To pious Jews who eagerly awaited the liberation of Israel from foreign domination, the Temple and the Herod monarchy were tainted by their Roman ties. The Jews yearned for a Messiah who would restore the reign of God, when the people of God relied on God alone, who provided for all their needs. John's appearance in the Judean desert evoked the memory of the Exodus and reminded people of a time when Moses led the Israelites out of slavery towards the Promised Land. In the desert, God provided for their needs. John's prophetic witness showed the people they did not need the corrupt religious and business practices to survive.

John offering a baptism for the forgiveness of sins struck at the core of the Temple franchise which depended on repentant sinners buying oxen, lambs and grain to offer as sacrifice for their various and sundry sins. John offered God's forgiveness freely: no ox, no doves, no stipend, no sacrifice. Needless to say, the priests, Levites and Sadducees were not amused. Here the words of Isaiah are fulfilled as John became that voice in the wilderness preparing a way for God – far from Jerusalem.

As we prepare to celebrate the coming of God into human history with the birth of Jesus Christ, we hear an urgent call from Scripture to do more than light candles on an Advent wreath and get our shopping done on time. The themes of “justice” and “righteousness” permeate today's readings like the ubiquitous icicle lights at holiday time. Justice means giving people their due, whether workers' wages or tenants rents or those who have been wronged their day in court. Righteousness means, above all, right

relationships. In other words, no one has the right to manipulate, exploit, intimidate or oppress another. The kingdom of God brought by the Messiah will be a time when all stand equally before God and we view others, no matter their race, gender, creed, nationality, sexual orientation, social or economic status, as our brothers and sisters.

There are the mountains of prejudice that still need to be lowered. There are deep valleys of poverty that require to be filled in. These mountains and valleys exist in our own hearts, homes and neighborhoods. Advent calls us to be more reliant on God's Providence than on popular culture, political affiliation or social status to tell us what is right.

Advent invites us to enter into the desert of our hearts, as it were, and rid our feelings and thoughts of anything that does not flow from God or lead us to God. Advent not only recalls the coming of Jesus 2,000 years ago, but more importantly reminds us that Jesus will come again. Will it be this year? Will it be today? We do not know. While waiting, we must live by faith and do all we can to prepare ourselves and our world for Jesus when he returns to us as promised.

Now that the elections have taken place, respond to Maryknoll's invitation and engage policy makers on political and economic decisions that impact people around the world. Read "Loving our neighbor in a shrinking world," a resource developed by Maryknoll missionaries who view U.S. policies through the lens of those who, both in the U.S. and overseas, lack basic necessities, endure the scourge of racism, live with gender-based discrimination or feel the immediate impact of climate change. Contact the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns for more information: 202-832-1780, ogc@maryknoll.org, www.maryknollogc.org.

Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns: Peace, Social Justice & Integrity of Creation
P.O. Box 29132, Washington, D.C. 20017
202-832-1780 ogc@maryknoll.org www.maryknollogc.org