

John the Baptist smelled much like the Grinch. He stink, stank, stunk. How could he not? He dressed in camel hair! Everyone who has ever smelled a camel knows exactly what I mean. He was a bit of a runt, short and skinny, not the least bit imposing in a physical sense. Yet tens of not hundreds of thousands came to him to hear him speak, to humble themselves, to beg forgiveness for their sins and to be baptized by him in the Jordan river.

In spite of his apparent shortfalls, some of the Jews thought that John was the reincarnation of the Prophet Elijah because the Prophet Malachi foretold that Elijah would make the final preparations for the messianic Lord (*Sir 48:10 / Mal 4:5*). John the Baptist, the greatest of the Prophets (*CCC 717-720*) fulfills this mission, in the spirit of Elijah, (*Lk 1:17 / CCC 718*) in spite of his odd appearance, and his brokenness; problems that would cause most to turn away from the task at hand and hide from the crowd.

When Jesus chose his Apostles he picked a tax collector, an anti-government insurgent, brothers who couldn't stop arguing at the top of their lungs and for their leader a brash man who suffered from chronic foot-in-mouth disease. In fact the only Apostle who didn't seem to be broken to the world, the only one who would be considered acceptable for a leadership position in the modern world was Judas.

When we look at our Saints and study their lives several facts jump off the page about each and every one of them. They were all flawed, broken and weak in the face of temptation, just like us. Just like us they sinned every day, they made mistakes and they upset people. Sometimes inadvertently through inattention or temper, sometimes because they insisted on speaking the truth of the Gospel, even when it was diametrically opposed to the culture of the day.

The second fact is that they did their level best to live the words of Isaiah that we read today. "The Lord... has sent me to bring good news to the poor, to bind up hearts that are broken, to proclaim liberty to captives, freedom to those in prison." (*Is 61: 1*) Words read by Jesus in the Temple as he started his public ministry.

For some reason we don't think that these words apply to us, and we are mistaken. We are poor, not necessarily in secular wealth, but in spirit. We long for the joy that comes from a close relationship with God, but we are afraid to make the commitment, the changes necessary in our lives to experience it. We are all drawn to a deep, personal relationship with Our Savior. We are hard-wired for it, but like all relationships it requires time and commitment.

There are significant differences between our relationship with God and our relationships with other people. God will never disappoint. He will never be unfaithful, he will never leave us, and he won't fail us in our hour of need. All too often we don't even recognize that our hearts are broken because we don't have this relationship with God in our lives, a relationship that we desperately need.

Our captivity, our prison isn't in our brokenness, it is in part our inability to recognize our brokenness for the gift that it is. Our limitations force us to focus. They give structure to our lives, maybe not the structure that we want, but the structure that we need for the salvation of our souls. The freedom of a Christian is in our recognition that the yoke of our burden is for our benefit. It isn't a cause for sorrow; it is a cause for joy.

Today we take a small break from the penitential aspect of Advent to look forward with joy and anticipation to the birth of Our Lord. We take a break from agonizing over our flaws, our imperfections, our brokenness to enjoy a moment of wonder as we celebrate a story that is never boring and never gets old with the telling.

Every year we can feel the anticipation of the Virgin Birth in our hearts. Jesus Christ, the Son of God is born as man. Fully God, fully human, two natures complete in every way. Because of his human nature, Jesus was broken just as we are broken in every way but sin.

Think about it for a moment. God has experienced and remembers diaper rash, and the common cold. He had to learn reading, writing and arithmetic. He played in the streets, skinned his knees and did his chores. There were times when there wasn't enough to eat and times of plenty in his life, just like us. He suffered temptation, just like us, but unlike us he did not sin.

Our gifts to one another are tokens of love to the child whose birthday we are celebrating because one of the ways we show our love for God is the way we love each other.

What about our gift directly to the Christ Child? That comes to him in two parts. The first part, our sins, all of them; thought, word and deed offered to him in the sacrament of Confession to restore our relationship with the Christ Child. The second part, our brokenness, our aches, pains, disappointments, hopes and dreams; all the angst of our lives, our cross, offered here in the Mass, our sacrifice laid at the foot of the Cross.

Let us take the day, this day, and carve out a few moments to ponder and wonder about just how much Jesus loves us. How blessed we really are to be broken; how wonderful it is to recognize our brokenness.

Why? Because without our brokenness we would be consumed with pride and pride is the first of the deadly sins for a reason. It is the devil's favorite tool for use toward the ruin of our souls. However, in recognizing our brokenness for what it is, a gift from God, we learn humility and in that great virtue find our way to the manger, to the Cross, and to our salvation.