

Fr. John Sassani
Homily Given December 9, 2007
Second Sunday of Advent - Liturgical Year A

At one point in my life, I took a vacation to the Grand Tetons in Wyoming. I was astounded by the natural beauty and by the amazingly abundant wildlife – elk, bears, moose, wolves, buffalo, eagles, and fish. We saw all sorts of hazard signs, warning us to their presence, but had no problems. On our last day, we went rafting on the Snake River – this was a scenic ride, not whitewater! – and we were placidly floating along. All of a sudden, an eagle came out of nowhere and grabbed a trout from the river. That fish went from wildlife to dinner in one fell swoop.

The eagle acted on its instinct – and the Prophet Isaiah noticed the predator-prey relationship in our world. He noticed this instinct but still looked forward to the day when eagles and trout will be friends, along with the wolves and the sheep, and with all other unnatural friendship pairs.

John the Baptist was familiar with the wilderness too – in both the desert and city versions. In the desert, he saw animals' instincts that were threatening and overwhelming. He saw the same in the city of Jerusalem; as long as John proclaimed the hard truths, he provoked the instinctive wrath of King Herod. In both places, the Word of the Lord encouraged John and made him steadfast. And in turn, he called people to conversion.

His message stripped away all the pretense and made manifest the disordered instincts of his listeners. But, more importantly, he promised a savior who would make manifest the thoughtful, heartfelt, steadfast love of God and remake us as people who are thoughtful, heartfelt, and loving – like God.

Therefore, let us ask ourselves – what instincts in us run contrary to the Kingdom? Too busy to pray? Inattentive to the Sacred Scriptures? Holding grudges that facilitate hatred? Self-centeredness in any of its forms?

Advent calls us to the desert – to the wilderness where we can see the instincts that run contrary to the Gospel. We discover in the wilderness that we can't save ourselves from our basic instincts, but that Christ will help us live in harmony with God and with neighbor.

Christ in the desert may be calling us today – not to the first Baptism with water but to the second baptism – Penance – so that we can turn down the instincts and turn up the virtues in our lives, so that we can contribute to the coming of Kingdom.