

## Prepare Your Heart for the Lord

(From Faith Catholic's 'The Faithful Servant')

**1<sup>st</sup> Reading:** Bar 5:1-9 | **2<sup>nd</sup> Reading:** Phil 1:4-6, 8-11 | **Gospel:** Lk 3:1-6

Today we have blogs and life coaches, Facebook groups and self-help books, all of which can help us become better human beings. These resources come to mind as we read St. Paul's Letter to the Philippians – I think St. Paul would be the ultimate life coach! All of his letters to the early Church offer wisdom, encouragement, and instruction, and the words we heard today are particularly significant as we prepare for Jesus' coming this Advent: "the one who began a good work in you will continue to complete it until the day of Christ Jesus." Unlike some of our modern-day resources, Paul's words go beyond simply helpful advice; they are rooted in faith and prayer, and in the truth of the Paschal Mystery. These words assure us that we are not alone on our journey, that what God has promised in the person of his Son will come to fruition: Christ will come again! And so, as John the Baptist did, we who as disciples are meant to witness to his coming, announcing the Good News and preparing for his – second – coming. Repent. Believe. "Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths." How do we do this? Engage with Scripture – read it and really hear what the Word of God is saying to you. Pray for insight, that the grace of God might transform you to go forth and announce the Gospel.

We spent more time than perhaps we should have hunting down the perfect gifts, especially for loved ones. We scour ads, then get up early on black Friday and hit the stores in search of deals and hard-to-find items. Perhaps that's why these words from St. Paul are more relevant: "And this is my prayer: that your love may increase ever more and more in knowledge and every kind of perception, *to discern what is of value*, so that you may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ." During Advent, these words can both assure and challenge us – to grow in love, knowledge, and a sense of what really matters during our time on earth. For us, the challenge may be to spend less time shopping this season and more time focusing on deepening our relationship with God, who is preparing to turn the darkness into light. This doesn't mean we can't take delight in finding that perfect gift; but we ought also to increase our recognition that all gifts come from God, including our ability to have access to and means to purchase material gifts. We can find joy in God's presence (and presents?) among us.

Re-read today's Gospel, and then consider how Saint Paul followed in John the Baptist's footsteps in his Letter to the Philippians. Think of ways you, like John and Paul, can encourage one another, and be a voice crying out in the desert. Participate in the sacrament of reconciliation and pray that God may cleanse your heart to welcome him at Christmas, and when he comes again.