

**Not too many years ago, newspapers carried the story of Al Johnson, a Kansas man who repented of his sins and chose Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior. What made his story so remarkable was the fact that, as a result of his newfound faith in Christ, he confessed to a bank robbery he had participated in when he was nineteen years old. Because of the statute of limitations, Johnson could not be prosecuted for the offense. But because of his complete and total change of heart, he not only confessed his crime but voluntarily repaid his share of the stolen money. That's metanoia, the Greek word for repentance, as a result of a radical change of heart demanded by John the Baptist in today's Gospel reading.**

**Today's readings remind us that the past, present and future comings of Jesus into the world are the fulfillment of the saving plan of God. Today's Scripture readings deal with coming home – the Jews exiled in Babylon coming home in Isaiah, the shalom or perfect peace coming home in the Responsorial Psalm, our going home with Jesus at His Second Coming as St. Peter tells us in the second reading, and Jesus, the**

**Savior, “coming home into our lives during Advent as today’s Gospel reading reminds us.**

**All three readings focus on the absolute necessity of our readying ourselves by repentance and reparation for Christ’s coming. In the first reading, Isaiah assures his people that God will restore their homeland to them and care for them as a shepherd cares for his sheep. Today’s Responsorial Psalm speaks of the return of shalom, the Hebrew word for perfect peace, and pardon to the people. The second reading gives an answer to those who scoff at the expectation of the Second Coming of Christ, explaining that God’s way of reckoning time is different from ours and that God has His own reasons for delaying Christ’s second coming. Peter gives us the assurance that Jesus is sure to come again although we do not know when. Hence, while we wait, we should be leading lives of holiness and godliness. Finally, the Gospel tells us that the restoration of the fallen world has already begun, starting with the arrival of John the Baptist, the messenger and forerunner of the Messiah. John speaks of one, more powerful than he – Jesus Christ – who will**

**baptize us with the Holy Spirit. Each of us has received the gift of the Holy Spirit in Baptism, and now we live in the Spirit each day, waiting for the return of our Lord Jesus Christ. Thus, we become John the Baptist's successors, preparing for Christ's return which will bring a new and perfect world.**

**God's tireless attention to us is shown forth eloquently in the lives of the saints, who are always striving to seek out the lost sheep and tend to the needs of those around them. St. Louis IX of France in the thirteenth century, is a perfect example. His 52-year reign is still considered one of France's most golden ages. He understood that God had not made him King so that he could enjoy himself, but so that he could show forth God's goodness to his people. He used to walk through the streets of his cities distributing alms by the handful. He would go into the hospitals and homes for the dying and nurse the worst cases himself. He would sometimes invite to his own royal dinner table twenty homeless people whose filth and stench revolted even the soldiers of his guard. Once when he was outside, heard the distant rattle of a leper, which was a warning**

to stay away from the afflicted person. But St. Louis walked directly towards the sound instead of away from it, and embraced the hideously deformed man. He gave special attention to the administration of justice, introducing lasting reforms in the legal system. His biographer even tells about how he would sometimes leave morning Mass and go outside under the oak tree near edge of the woods. He would stay there all day to hear complaints and cases of the common people, administering justice quickly and fairly so that they didn't have to invest time and money in following the complex court procedures. He was always present to his people, because he had discovered that God was always present to him. God is present to us too, always waiting for us.

Like St. Louis of France, how do we discover God's presence in us?

For some – to a tragic degree – and for most, to some degree, there is a let down when Christmas finally arrives.

There is a psychological explanation for this. Most of us, consciously or unconsciously, have the image of

**Christmas as a Norman Rockwell painting: a happy family surrounded by loving friends trimming a flawless tree, eating cookies and drinking our favorite beverage; a roaring fire in the hearth with snow seen through the window falling gently and piling in the corners of the windowpanes. If you want a perfect example of this, just watch all the Christmas movies that the Hallmark Channel in television has been showing since the last week of October 24 hours a day until the first week of January 2021.**

**Spiritually, Christmas is also frequently a letdown. We remember past Christmases and may recall little spiritual progress that we have achieved during the Advent Seasons' imperatives urging us to be spiritually prepared for the coming of Jesus – at Christmas and His Second Coming.**

**But there is a light at the end of this tunnel. Our readings this morning suggest some ways of being in the world. Advent is often long on the doing, but short on the being. That leads to the inevitable frustration; of spiritually empty spirits on Christmas morning.**

**Perhaps this Advent Season, we might concentrate on John the Baptist's proclaiming and living the truth that preparing the way for the Lord is not in doing, but in being, not in filling, but emptying our lives. He seems to tell us that the desert or something equivalent to it in our lives is the only place bare enough and quiet enough to mirror our lives, our motives, and our disguises.**

**We need quiet time in Advent. To get quiet time, we need to reschedule, to reprioritize, and to enable to get inside ourselves for being with the Lord. That desert, that quiet time gives us the opportunity for getting insight in our hearts.**

**John called the Jews to the desert wilderness where God could find them. The desert is the perfect place to prepare. In desert isolation, we have no distractions of job, parenting, grand-parenting, and other mindless routines in our lives. When our minds are full of "stuff", not even God Himself can break in to us.**

**We need this quiet time, this desert, to be real to us not only during this Advent and Christmas Seasons but throughout the year. This quiet time, which we have to**

**make as part of our daily lives, will enable us to be with the Lord, and pause to listen to what He has to say to us – what thoughts He plants in our minds. This even helps us to discover God’s presence in the people and events around us. We can see in others that presence and manifestation of the holy. We can see their underlying goodness. The more attentive we are to God’s presence, the more we become God’s presence for others.**

**Finally, when we bask in the presence of God during those quiet times in our daily lives, we feel a quiet joy. We do not have to wait for Christmas because there is already a residual joy within us. All we need to do is live our lives cultivating God’s presence within us and others as well.**

**We do not have to come to the night before Christmas and try to look like a perfect person who is perfectly ready to greet the Lord when He comes. He has already arrived. Our God loves us as we are – and comes to us in our opening the door when He knocks.**