

Special Delivery WEEK THREE December 13, 2020 FR. MIKE'S MESSAGE

I grew up watching TV game shows.

My favorites were the ones that tested people's knowledge.

Contestants had to answer questions on a whole range of subjects.

Any time I knew the answer, I'd shout it at the TV.

As a kid, I'd dream of winning the big prize, thinking: *that would make my life perfect!*

SCREEN: Alex Trebek photo

Alex Trebek died last month.

For 37 years he was the host of Jeopardy, a TV quiz show.

He was not your typical host - he wasn't warm and fuzzy, didn't hug, didn't joke (but could be sarcastic).

As so often happens, it's only after a celebrity dies that we discover the full measure of their life, and Alex Trebek's 80 years of life was full.

Outside of Jeopardy he traveled the world on behalf of children's charities and the USO.

He donated millions to universities.

A few months before his death he published a memoir titled, *The Answer Is....* which was the phrase he uttered dozens of times in every episode of Jeopardy.

He once said this about how to measure a person's life, quote:

Don't tell me what you believe in.

I'll observe how you behave and I will make my own determination.

SCREEN: Special Delivery main screen

This is week three of our Advent message series titled, Special Delivery.

We are preparing to celebrate the special delivery of God's Son at Christmas.

The readings this month give us the answer to the biggest question about life: *why are we here on earth?*

In the Gospel reading we heard today,

the Jewish leaders traveled to the Jordan because they had their own questions that needed answering.

Their back and forth with John the Baptist reminds me of a TV quiz show.

They were curious about John - who was he, what was his mission all about.

John seemed reluctant to tell them what they wanted to hear -

he kept them guessing.

When they asked, *Who are you?* he told them who he was not.

John said, *I am not the Christ and I am not Elijah.*

So then they asked him: *Are you the prophet?*

John answered, *"No."*

You can sense their frustration.

They asked one last time: *Who are you?*

Here was John's answer:

SCREEN: "I am the voice of one crying out in the desert,

'make straight the way of the Lord,'

They still weren't satisfied, so they stormed off

and left John to his work of baptizing.

So I guess the final answer about John and his mission

is that he was the one saying: *prepare!*

Prepare the way of the Lord!

Get ready, because the messiah is coming!

Okay, prepare, but how?

John the Baptist taught that in order to get ready,

a person has to begin by taking a good hard look at one's life and priorities.

Asking the questions: *Are my words and actions consistent?*

Do I say I'm a follower of God, but allow other things in life

to take priority over my faith?

Because it's not what you say you believe,

it's how you behave that determines who you are.

Those who went out to the Jordan River to hear John preach

knew that they were not ready for the coming of the messiah.

They wanted to change - to go in a better direction

and John pointed the way.

He told them to repent, to turn away from sin so they could welcome Christ.

This is something every person who wants to be a disciple must do.

It is the most basic teaching of our faith - we hear it every Ash Wednesday:

turn away from sin and believe in the Gospel.

So how does John's message apply to us?

After all, we've already been baptized, isn't that enough?

And the answer is, no.

The call of John the Baptist is as timely for us as it was for the people he baptized at the Jordan.

Like them, we need to prepare to welcome Christ, but how do we start?

It begins when you and I are willing to take a good hard look at our lives, see if our priorities are in order - see if there is any inconsistency between our words and our actions - and be willing to change.

SCREEN: what is my purpose in life?

Start by asking yourself this question:

what is my purpose in life?

Why am I here on this earth?

The world tells you that you are a consumer.

A consumer - that your sole purpose in life is to work, in order to make money, so you can buy and spend and acquire material possessions.

Live to work, buy, spend, and own.

We are bombarded by this message dozens of times every day.

Move to a bigger house, give your kitchen a makeover, buy a fancier car, new clothes, a bigger, smarter TV, and on and on and on.

And when do we hear this message most?

In Advent as we prepare for Christmas!

Resisting it is a real challenge.

Parents, you really feel the pressure.

But giving others more stuff does not equal love.

Possessions aren't bad.

But life is not one big game show.

Dying with the most possessions doesn't make you a winner.

John the Baptist told us what our purpose in life is.

He revealed our true identity.

Who are we, why are we here?

The answer is...

SCREEN: You are a child of God, called to follow Jesus.

Your purpose in this life is to prepare for eternal life.

Followers of Jesus are people on a mission.

They seek the will of God so they can be Jesus's hands and feet in the world.

That's why you are here.

This is what it means to have your priorities in order and put God first.

When you and I embrace our mission,

not only will we be happier now,

but we will grow in our desire to be with God forever after.

Only God can quench our thirsts and feed our spiritual hunger.

Only God can make our lives meaningful.

Only God.

Everything in this world pales by comparison.

Isn't this the lesson we've learned this past year with the pandemic?

Jobs can be lost, finances can get tight,

our health and safety can be compromised.

So it only makes sense to invest in spiritual realities that can never be taken away.

These next two weeks of Advent, be willing to look

into your heart and your life, ask the tough questions, and be willing to change.

And let me offer you a few ways to help.

SCREEN: Pray event screen

This coming Thursday, I invite you to come to St. Pius

for an evening of prayer and reconciliation.

From 7-7:45pm, our church will be open, the lights will be dimmed,

so that you can pray to God asking for whatever you need -

comfort, peace, guidance, or forgiveness.

And if you feel so inclined, you can also receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

Fr. Greg Apparcel and I will both be hearing confessions on Thursday.

I know that for some Catholics, confession is a really difficult sacrament.

And I think one reason is that they tend to put the focus on their sins rather than on God's merciful love.

As priests, we don't sit in judgement of the one confessing.

We simply stand in the place of Christ to say,

"God loves you, God forgives, be reconciled and begin again."

And if you don't remember the steps for confession - what to say or do - we will have a handout with all the steps.

We all need to confess and receive forgiveness - even priests.

Because it is so easy for us to get off track in life - to allow other things to rule our hearts and control our lives.

Sometimes it's specific actions that take us away from God and our purpose in life.

It can also be certain attitudes that we need to acknowledge and let go of: anger, hatred, judgmentalness, indifference, selfishness.

If we don't acknowledge and confess these things, our relationship with God and others can be derailed.

And this can happen so gradually that we don't even notice it happening.

God's forgiveness in the Sacrament has the power to heal us and bring us back - can restore balance and renew our purpose in life.

So please consider taking advantage of this opportunity.

SCREEN: Rejoice image

You may have noticed that the rose colored candle on our Advent wreath is lit today.

This third Sunday of Advent has a Latin name: Gaudete Sunday.

Gaudete is Latin for 'Rejoice'.

As challenging as life is right now, we have lots of reasons to rejoice.

And even little things can fill us with joy - the laughter of a child, a conversation with a friend,

the smell of a Christmas tree and the warm glow of it's lights.

Well, to truly rejoice in our faith, we must share it with others.

And what better way to do that than by inviting someone you know who may be searching for answers about life or their purpose in the world.

Why not begin by inviting him or her to worship with us online this Christmas.

And to help you do that we've created invitations for you to use - images for social media and ones you can print right at home, maybe even to include in your Christmas cards.

Here's one of them:

SCREEN: Christmas Eve invite

Go to the Christmas page of our website for ways to help you reach out to those in your life and help them connect with us this Christmas. We've got some amazing things planned for our online Mass, which we know will fill others with hope and joy and light.

SCREEN: Alpha image

And you can also invite them to check out a program called Alpha.

Alpha is specifically designed for non-churchgoers - for people who are seeking.

The program will be run online by a team of parishioners who create an open, non-judgmental environment, where the big questions about life or faith can be asked.

We ran Alpha for the first time this past Spring and will be starting a new session right after New Year's.

I guarantee there is someone in your life who would benefit from Alpha so consider inviting them.

When you share your faith with others, you are expressing your thanks to God for the gift of faith.

Isaiah and John remind us that we have been given an amazing gift in our faith - a gift that must be shared.

And when we do, Isaiah's vision becomes a reality:

we bring glad tidings to the poor,

healing to the brokenhearted,

liberty to captives,

and release to those who are imprisoned by despair or doubt.

Today, let us hear the voice of Christ

calling us to recommit to putting him first in our lives. Amen. +