

What would the message of Scripture be if it wasn't John who was spoken of in the gospel but rather you or me? I suspect it would probably be pretty much the same, but completely different in the way it would connect with everyday life and the celebration of the Eucharist.

It would also present you and me with some pretty interesting challenges, so let's take a stab at it and see what it might sound like. I'll plug my name in, but as you listen, plug in your own and adjust the grammar appropriately. Here goes:

A man named Tim was sent from God.  
He came for testimony, to testify to the light,  
so that all might believe through him.  
He was not the light,  
but came to testify to the light.

So far, so good, seems to me. This passage describes all of us, and your name sounds just as good in there as mine because this is our common mission. Let me take a few liberties with the text now, and move us along....

And this is the testimony of Tim.  
When people raised their eyebrows and asked, "Who are you?"  
He admitted and did not deny it,  
but admitted, "I am not the Christ."  
So they asked him,  
"What are you then? Are you here to tell us we'd better shape  
up?"  
And he said, "I am not."  
"You think you're better than the rest of us, don't you?"  
He answered, "Nope."  
So they said to him,  
"Who are you then, and why do you act the way you do?  
What do you have to say for yourself?"  
He said:  
"I am *the voice of one crying out in the desert,*  
*'make straight the way of the Lord,'"*

That's your Advent mission and mine, just as surely as it was John's.

How do we go about doing that? Preparing that straight way for the Lord means at least four things, it seems to me:

1. Becoming prepared to explain the revelations of God to people who ask us, as clearly as we're able;
2. Becoming prepared to address people's objections to the faith as best we can;
3. Becoming prepared to point out that the way of the Lord is self-giving love, clearly visible in the life of Jesus, the Eucharist we celebrate together, and in the way we live our lives;
4. Getting out of God's way, allowing God to operate straight through us; to express God's love without hindrance, as God's love needs to be expressed through us, nuanced by the unique talents, strengths and weaknesses each personality has. Upon reflection, you might agree that this part's actually lots more about God preparing us than about us preparing anything for God.

So, how does the passage sound with your own name in there? Are you prepared to make straight the way of the Lord? Since Advent's a time of preparation, let me suggest a couple of things you might want to explore by way of preparation.

First, prepare your elevator speech about why you're a Catholic. An 'elevator speech' is what sales folks are prepared to say to executives or business owners if they happen to find themselves together for the brief span of time that an elevator ride takes. Properly done, those execs should step off the elevator and write you a check for everything you make, wondering aloud how they'd ever gotten along without it.

Likewise, a good Catholic elevator speech would leave the listener deeply touched and eager to hear more. While you're preparing your elevator speech, don't be surprised if the first person you touch deeply turns out to be yourself.

Next, prepare a welcome spot for God within yourself. Make yourself take some time for *lectio divina*, contemplative prayer, the Divine Office, a rosary on the drive in to work, spiritual reading or some other prayer habit.

It takes three weeks to lay down any habit. Having a prayer spot and a prayer time is helpful as long as you don't become OCD about it. At the bare minimum, thank God for something – anything – at least once a day; since gratitude is the foundation of all prayer. Even in the busiest of lives, thanksgiving will eventually lead to far more interesting things.

'Thanksgiving' is what the word "Eucharist" means. If you can attend mass daily, you make yourself available for great growth, even though you may not understand how it's actually happening. Such is the way God works in us. During such times it may occur to us that it is actually God who is doing the heavy lifting, and we understand as the prophet Isaiah did: "...it is you, [God], who have accomplished all we have done." (Is 26:12).

Allowing God to make straight the path within us is ultimately the best way to prepare for God's coming, for in the very act of preparing, God's love enters the story of our daily lives just as truly as you and I entered that Scripture story together just a few moments ago. And when we become aware that God's deeply woven into the warp and woof of our stories, we're as prepared as prepared gets.