Sunday’s Gospel
Mt 3:1-12

In due course John the Baptist appeared; he preached in the wilderness of Judaea and this was his message: ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is close at hand’. This was the man the prophet Isaiah spoke of when he said:

A voice cries in the wilderness:
Prepare a way for the Lord,
make his paths straight.

This man John wore a garment made of camel-hair with a leather belt round his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. Then Jerusalem and all Judaea and the whole Jordan district made their way to him, and as they were baptised by him in the river Jordan they confessed their sins. But when he saw a number of Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism he said to them, ‘Brood of vipers, who warned you to fly from the retribution that is coming? But if you are repentant, produce the appropriate fruit, and do not presume to tell yourselves, “We have Abraham for our father”, because, I tell you, God can raise children for Abraham from these stones. Even now the axe is laid to the roots of the trees, so that any tree which fails to produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown on the fire. I baptise you in water for repentance, but the one who follows me is more powerful than I am, and I am not fit to carry his sandals; he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing-fan is in his hand; he will clear his threshing-floor and gather his wheat into the barn; but the chaff he will burn in a fire that will never go out.’

John’s message, “Repent for the kingdom of heaven is close at hand”, challenges us in two ways. If we accept that we need repentance, that we need conversion, then it calls us to see where in our life, in our relationships with others, in how truthful we are with ourselves, we need to repent, to change direction. It may also challenge us the way John was challenging the Pharisees and Sadducees. For them approaching John for baptism was just another ritual, maybe they were vaguely interested in his message but we get the impression that they were not coming in humility with repentant hearts. We would call John a fanatic, a fundamentalist these days going by what he said to them. But he was being truthful, calling them to sincerity to the truth. This is where the real challenge comes for us, “if you are repentant, produce the appropriate fruit”. Don’t let our faith be just a ritual, something we have to do, every week, or every now and then. This gospel comes bringing light into our lives, not to live in fear under a law of having to do good, or at least appearing to like the Pharisees, it calls us to sincerity and truth. Challenging, certainly, maybe we are being asked to change our ideas, assumptions or even more. We don’t need to live on locusts and wild honey and be dressed in Camel hair like John to be different, radical. In this day and age one of the most radical of things we can do is to believe in Jesus Christ and His love for us.

Reflection

Today’s gospel and this time of Advent call us to sincerity and truth. Reflect on what areas of your life you may need the light of God’s love to help you take up the challenge of true repentance.