

Your Best Yes, Week 2 – “Repent”

Happy advent everyone! We are so glad you are here. We know that this is the busiest time of the year for you and you experience all kinds of pressure and that pressure can make us feel like we don't have choices.

We said last week that we do have choices in life and those choices can be made through the process of discernment of choosing the greatest good for ourselves and involving God in the process. We said that in the process of discernment we can say Yes to things and other times we will say NO to things. We said saying NO is hard but necessary and people have to understand that even if they are friends or relatives.

Well that was me this past Tuesday. My cousin who lives in Secaucus NJ - was giving a holiday party for her friends of whom she has many. And she wanted me to come. She's an extrovert. I'm not so extroverted as many of you know. She likes parties. I do also - but to an extent. Besides, it was going to be Tuesday evening and Tuesday is my day off and evening traffic on the NJ Turnpike going north for the next few weeks before Christmas, it's going to be horrible. I just I look forward to relaxing on Tuesday. Plus, to her un-churched friends, a priest is a complete curiosity. Plus, before the evening is over inevitably, I know one of these people after a few drinks will corner me and say: "You know, I've got a bone to pick with the Catholic Church."

So with all these pluses going back and forth in my mind of whether to go or not to go: I said to myself "I haven't seen her and other members of the family for a while. So with all that said - guess what I did: I went anyway. I had a choice and instead of saying NO I said YES. It's wasn't actually a relaxing evening off for me.

When we only act out of obligation as we often do, there's every chance that we're working against ourselves and self-defeating ways and ways that are not really in sync with how God has made us. You choose to say, "Yes" just like you choose to say, "No." And the best way to know when to say, "Yes" and when to say, "No" is to base your discernment in love.

And that's what this series is really all about, how we can grow in love, grow to love God more, to love others and inspired by that love to make disciples through

our very best yes. So, today, we're going to look at that first part, the "growing to love God" part, and what is one of if not, in fact, the very best way to do it?

And to help us out, we're going to look at a passage from the Gospel of Luke. So, here's how he begins. ***"In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was tetrarch, he was king of Galilee."*** And then, he continues to name other political figures of the day that means nothing to us now. But the point is that he wants us to know that his story is not a fable or a fairy-tale. It is grounded in history. Christianity is a historical religion. Luke continues, ***"The word of God came to John, the son of Zechariah in the desert. He went throughout the whole region proclaiming a baptism for the forgiveness of sins."***

The John referred to is not John the Gospel writer but another John we know as John the Baptist. John was a cousin of Jesus who had been chosen by God to be a preacher and prophet. He's usually considered the last and the greatest prophet of the Bible.

And his message goes like this.

"Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his path. Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill be made low. The winding roads shall be made straight, and the rough roads smooth, and all flesh shall see the salvation of God."

Whenever a king or a powerful, important person was expected somewhere, workmen would go before him to do roadwork. They would smooth out the rough patches, creating a clear, easier path for the king's arrival to make it faster and more efficient. The king John is anticipating was his cousin, Jesus, whom John recognized as the king of kings, the son of God, the long-awaited savior and messiah who is to come into the world.

And the illustration of the roadwork is a metaphor for kind of spiritual preparation for the coming of the king. John himself called this preparation repentance. The word repent perhaps has a negative connotation in our culture. It certainly misused in many religious contexts. But here's essentially what John meant.

Repentance is all about three things, a change in thinking which leads to a change of heart, which eventually leads to a change in behavior. To repent means that at an intellectual level, I realized that I needed to think differently because what I am doing isn't working. A change of thinking when sustained will usually lead to a change of heart. I begin to feel differently about something. In turn, a change of heart, when sincere and sustained, is going to bring a change in behavior, in decisions, and in choices. You know like any good parent, God wants to give direction to our lives, towards what's best for us. But one thing usually stands in his way, and that one thing is us.

We stand in his way because we don't slow down to listen to Him and learn from Him, to get to know Him in a personal way. To get to know His will and His way in our lives, to change our mind, to change our heart, to change our lives. So, perhaps in the week ahead, as your exercise this week, when it comes to repentance, perhaps you could consider where you're at on that spectrum.

When it comes to repentance, we tend to be one of several places. In one place, we can find ourselves praying this prayer, **"God I want what I want. Please give me what I want."** We tell God what we want and never really slow down to ask if it's our best yes. We have our mind made up about a decision or a choice, but we haven't yet stopped to consider what God says. We want what we want.

We think, **"I'm going to buy that out. So, I'm going to marry that guy. I'm going to take that job. I'm going to go to that school."** And we never bother to ask God for his input. And if we're honest, we're actually reluctant to ask God because we already know that we're not on the same page with Him. And the funny thing about this attitude is, and we've all done it, when things go wrong, we turn around and blame God. **"How could you let this happen to me?"** - when in fact, He was never part of the discussion. He was never part of the equation to begin with.

A second place that we can find ourselves when it comes to repentance is where we want to follow God. We honestly do but only kind of, only sort of. We recognize perhaps even understand God's will. We just haven't fully embraced it. In our mind, we have repented and turned toward God. In our mind we have, but it hasn't really reached our heart.

With this attitude in this place, our prayer goes like this, **"God I want what you want, but not yet. I want what you want, but for now, give me what I want."**

On the other hand, real repentance and the goal of the whole Christian life is to come to a place of complete surrender. And in that place, we can sincerely pray, **"God, I want what you want. Please give me what you want. Help me to want what you want."** As best we can, we actively pursue God's will over of our own with a goal of eventually the whole of our life. The goal of the Christian life is to come to a place where we can trust God with the whole of our life.

The greatest way to love God, the most efficient and effective way to love God is to trust Him. Probably most of us are familiar with John the Baptist and his role in the Christmas story because we hear it each year at Christmas. We hear his announcement to prepare the way. But we shouldn't allow the familiarity of his message to mess the impact of his message. John's announcement concerns the advent of grace and truth - the advent of grace and truth in our world - the advent of grace and truth that is the coming of Christ, the coming that changes everything.

This Christmas, why not forget the anxiety, and the anger, and the anxiousness of it all. Instead, invite the grace and truth of Christ into your busyness. Choose to give God and give yourself the Christmas gift of your very best yes.