

Second Sunday of Advent December 8, 2024

“The precursor of Christ—the voice of one crying in the wilderness—preaches in the desert of the soul that has known no peace.” (Origen, Homilies on the Gospel of Luke)

In the Gospel we heard proclaimed today, Saint Luke speaks of the word of God coming to Saint John the Baptist while he lived in the desert. Before proceeding further, I must mention some translations use the term “wilderness” instead of desert. These two terms can denote two completely different geographies teeming with their unique and varying ecologies. For our intended use, I will use the term “desert” for it conveys a point I would like to reflect upon.

What image comes into your mind when you think of the desert? We may not be able to settle upon one image because deserts vary depending upon their location. There are, however, a few rules for surviving in a desert which apply to all environments. We shall use two of these and apply them to our spiritual journey this Advent season. The first concerns the heat of the desert during the day. The second concerns the need for water.

Survival guides stress a desert can become extremely hot during the day. The heat in some deserts can exceed 120 degrees. One is encouraged to seek out shade during the daylight hours and only travel during the cool of the nights. As one expert stated, in a video, you cannot out pace or out walk the sun. The sun is going to shine and there is nothing you can do about it.

Secondly, water is a premium resource in the desert. A person can only exist for a short period of time without water. The famous television survival expert, Bear Grylls, recounted a story where his crew was told by members of a desert search and rescue team to not wander away from their designated filming location where they had much needed water. It had been explained that a person would only be able to survive roughly 6 hours in the desert at that time of year without water. Other experts encouraged those in desert conditions to refrain from eating anything, for water would be required for digestion. They spoke of certain signs to be aware of which could lead one to finding water: morning dew under rocks, the flight of birds and, most importantly, the sight of green vegetation. Each expert and guide concluded by reminding of the adherence to these two important lessons, the heat of the day and the need of water, can either lead to one’s survival or death.

One may ask: “How do these two rules apply to my spiritual journey in Advent?” This is a good question since we are currently not in a desert and may never find ourselves visiting one. I offer this thought for your consideration. Our lives, at this moment, are ones lived in a desert. I realize there are no sand dunes in the parking lot, but outside these four walls we will encounter an arid desert of godlessness. From the radios in our cars, the televisions in our homes, or the phones in our pockets, anti-God rhetoric is daily portrayed to us. I remember a time when the commercialization associated with Christmas was the worst thing we had to contend with. Now, think about the daily messages we hear pronounced to us by all of the “experts.” Coupled with these statements, there is the daily drain of trying to live, just making sure we can pay our bills. The monetary strain many families daily face adds untold stress to their married lives. Finally, we cannot forget the moral decay of society and the destruction of Truth, which has been

usurped by individual feelings. To rephrase the survival guides, we cannot outrun this world. It is going to beat us down until we have nothing left in the tank to fuel our journey. We must seek the spiritual waters provided by God through His Church to satisfy us in these dry times. We need the waters of Grace. These are provided through the Sacraments of the Church (why would one skip Mass, I have no clue), daily reading of the Bible, daily praying of devotions and so many more oases of life-giving water. We need these. We cannot live without these. Sadly, without these we are spiritually dead inside. While we have time, let us rededicate ourselves to staying hydrated in the Lord.