

Second Sunday of Advent
December 7, 2025
Year of the Holy Spirit

“A voice or sound is an obscure utterance, manifesting no secret of the heart but signifying this only: that the one who calls out wants to say something. A word, however, is rational speech, opening the heart’s mystery. While a voice as such is common to both animals and men, a word is fitting only to humans. Thus John was called a voice and not a word, because, through John, God demonstrated neither his mercies nor his justice nor his counsels prepared before the foundation of the world but only this: that God was planning to do something great in human history.”

(Anonymous, Incomplete Work on Matthew, Homily 3)

One of the unfortunate consequences of the teaching which allows for the personal interpretation of Sacred Scripture by an individual is – the individual can fail to understand why a particular passage was specifically written and thus lead to an incomplete understanding. I offer this thought to remind ourselves that, as Catholics, we have roughly 2,000 years of Scriptural interpretation offered by many of the greatest Christian minds to have ever lived. Their writings offer all much to consider; possibly more than we, ourselves, would have ever considered.

With this thought in mind, Saint Matthew takes his time to describe both the attire and food choices of Saint John the Baptist. We must ask the famous question: Why? What is the significance of Saint John’s attire and his choice to dine upon locusts and wild honey? With the assistance of these first great Church thinkers and teachers, let us examine the significance of Saint John’s dress and food choice.

Saint Peter Chrysologus describes the outfit of camel’s hair as not being a “refined” choice of dress. The camel was not seen as a strikingly graceful animal. It was useful, but its use was limited for specific purposes. It could carry both persons and heavy loads. Though not as graceful as a horse nor strong as an ox, the camel did serve a purpose. As Saint Peter noted, the camel was intended for a specific work as was Saint John the Baptist. Likewise, the leather belt around his waist served a purpose. It was to hold fast the camel’s skin to the body of Saint John. Furthermore, the locusts on which he fed were understood as the food of sinners who were seeking repentance. As one consumed the locusts, it was assumed that the sinner, through this humbling action, would fly on the wings of forgiveness towards heaven as a locust flies through the sky. Lastly, the wild honey was a meal not procured through the efforts of a man, but rather through service of bees. To come upon wild honey was seen as a gift given by God; one not earned by one’s efforts alone.

Placing these things together, one begins to understand that everything about Saint John was a visible symbol of his mission as “forerunner of the Christ.” The camel hair coat reminds us of how God had to sacrifice an animal to acquire the clothing which He would clothe Adam and Eve with after their fall in the Garden. A sacrifice had to be made to cover man’s shame. The belt reminds of this fall which led to man’s separation, his relationship with God and creation. Sin clings to man as tightly as a belt holds a person’s attire to the person. Since the Fall, each generation of man must be fed with the food of repentance, symbolic of the locust. The food we are to eat, our own need of repentance, must be consumed in humility. The message of the prophets of the Old Testament, the message of Saint John the Baptist, was one of repentance through humble actions, the action symbolized through the action of

eating. Finally, the sweetness of unearned wild honey, symbolizes the sweetness of unmerited grace. Like the bees, God performs all of the work and we freely partake of its goodness. The person of Saint John the Baptist, as described by Saint Matthew, his attire, his food, all remind us of our need to humbly repent of our sins and accept the generous free-flowing gift of God's Love. It is an eternal Love only attained by those who are willing to shed themselves of those sinful words and actions which hold them fast away from His loving embrace.