

12-07-2008 Homily

“Baptizing flesh and blood people with the Holy Spirit. What an amazing thing you are about to do, great Father of light.” It was a bright upwardly mobile angel who spoke.

“I know you’re about to send a messenger with the announcement of this good news. And I have figured the way. A colossal media event ... with lots of press coverage ... with the right back-drop, an interesting mix of the world’s best personages. Time of day is essential, the right light. Great make-up for the messenger: I have sketches. And, of course, the city. The city is essential. Jerusalem, Rome, Paris, Beijing, New York?”

God smiled. “I like your initiative. But I’ve given this some thought to. I’m sending my messenger to ... the desert.”

“The desert? No electricity, no amplification, no light shows ... almost no people. Lord of the universe, why make an important proclamation in the desert?”

“I have reasons,” smiled God. People spend a lot of time in deserts --- emotional deserts, economic deserts, spiritual deserts. People in the desert need to hear the message first. Plus, if the messenger proclaims my word in the desert and it bears fruit, everyone will know the miracle came from me and not from him. The messenger will need a lot of faith, but if you have faith, even in the face of the desert, miracles will follow.”

God was quiet then, but looking many centuries ahead. To parents so discouraged trying to share the way of holiness and Jesus with kids, that they told each other: Let’s give up. Our teenager is so unreceptive. It’s like talking into a stone wall, or into a desert.”
“Keep trying,” insisted God.

And the teacher going home, after the worst day at school ever, and said: “God, your kids are horrible, unfocused, inattentive, disrespectful. They don’t give a damn. I may as well move the Sahara. “You already are,” God replied. “But keep teaching.”

And the teenager walking away from friends and crying alone under a tree, tired of trying to be chaste when everyone else was ‘hooking up ... tired of keeping away from drinking and drugs when nobody else was. “My life is a desert; “I am so lonesome.” “Tough it out anyway nudged God,” with a pat on the back. “You’re doing great.”

And a participant in the San Francisco pro-life march, blown away by the rudeness and vicious yelling of the crowd, all because he was trying to return spiritual and civil rights to little unborn babies. “God, what a ... wasteland.” “Witness anyway,” urged God.

The desert is not a Palm Springs spa. It is a desolate, hostile, dry, inhospitable patch ... in the world or in your life.. But it’s a place of great holiness, if you’re brave enough for it ... like John the Baptist. And Jesus.

Jesus proclaims God's love from the abysmal desert of the cross, into the great gaping desert of hostile people making fun of him while he's tossing out the life preserve to save us, and preparing to baptize us with the Holy Spirit.