

Each year on the Second Sunday of Advent, John the Baptist takes center stage, calling us to repent: *“Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths...fill the valleys, level the mountains...straighten the winding roads and smooth the bumpy ones...”*

John is sometimes called the last of the Old Testament prophets, all of whom, in their own way, pointed to the coming of the Christ. John always seems intense, and his call to repent, to change, might makes us uneasy, but let us understand—he is an agent of God’s mercy. Even in John’s harsh call to reform, we remember that God is always merciful, God is love.

Of course, this cry of mercy from the lips of John the Baptist is a response to our sin. I remind us that sin is simply something we choose, knowing that it obstructs us from living in God’s love. It’s there within us: something that draws us toward the very things that we’re told aren’t good for us, and things that we know aren’t good for us. Yet they draw us.

Sin plays a part in our lives: it does for some, even as they truly fight against it. For others, perhaps it’s fair to say, it’s part of their lives because they don’t think it’s a big deal (*“I’m not as bad as a lot of other people, and I’m not sure there’s such thing as hell anyway”*).

John, and therefore the season of Advent, calls us to make ourselves ready for our Lord: *make straight the paths, smooth the rough ways*. In other words, take it seriously, consider what needs to change in your life, and to work at changing it.

One of the things God has given us, in his mercy, is the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Through it, we can reclaim our baptismal innocence and purity. We can start again. So, when was the last time you made a sacramental confession? For some, it’s been forever, because the sin of pride has told them they don’t need it. For some, it’s because it arouses an irrational fear. But we needn’t be afraid. Jesus is waiting to unburden your heart.

Because until you deal with what’s on your heart, like barnacles on the side of a ship...until you do, it keeps your heart from being fully alive, and even more, from receiving grace in the various ways God desires to give it. So what is it you need start changing and leave behind?

- Is it anger or impatience? Usually, felt toward those of our households, our places of work, or maybe other drivers?
- Is it using God’s holy name, or the name of Jesus, as a casual expression or even a swear word?
- Is it that you’re setting a bad example for others—especially, your family—of what it means to be a Christian man or woman?
- Is it that you make other things more important than time for God, such as preoccupation with self-comfort, TV, material possessions, YouTube videos or social media?
- For you, is it gossiping or incessant complaining (about other members of the church)?
- Is it about resentments you hold on to?
- Is it struggles with various sins of impurity, including what we view on our mobile devices, our game systems, our PCs, the ‘adult material’ that pollutes our hearts, distorts our understanding of God’s gift of human love and human dignity. By the way, statistics indicate the average 11-year-old has already been exposed to it. And as for adults, I’ve seen how it undermines and harms marriages—the feelings of betrayal. Learn how to fight against that temptation
- Maybe it’s our failure to trust in the truth, telling lies to impress others or avoid inconveniences.
- Is it that you’re receiving the Holy Eucharist while in a state of mortal sin, presuming God’s mercy.

Whether it’s any or all of these things, or anything else, what are the rough ways that you need to make smooth? What are the things you need to leave behind in order to receive God’s mercy—mercy manifest in the tender child to be born unto us?

Don't let fear and pride keep you from God's mercy. Take home one of the confession guides and prayerfully prepare, then come back and reclaim your innocence, even if it's been forever. Re-enter the life of grace and mercy. Prepare the way for the Lord.