

Welcome to the second week of a series we're calling "Your Best Yes." It hardly means the saying is complete cliché to say it at all, but we are up our ears from all the stuff that we have to prepare for. These next few weeks we can become very busy and occupied. Some of us will prepare lavish meals for family and friends, buy and wrapping gifts to go under the Christmas tree, setting up the Christmas tree itself and untangling the lights, preparing guest rooms for visiting family members and friends, and in-laws. These are all important but are they as important as preparing our heart to receive the divine King?

Maybe there's no avoiding the busyness and we just concede that point. But we don't have to be anxious, angry, or annoyed about it all if we set up a strategy to make this season the best season ever. Last week, we laid out one such strategy and we called it discernment. Discernment simply means deciding between the good things and the one great thing – often

times we focus on little goods rather than the greatest good; which is a true abiding relationship with Jesus Christ and his Church.

So many people approach Christmas and whole of their life as something we just got to get it done and over with it- "get er done" as one comedian says best. Just get through this season and into the New Year but that is not how God wants us to live. How do we find out the best way to live? How do we say yes to God with our whole mind, heart and soul? In other words how do we say our best yes to him? When we invite God into the decision making process. Discernment also is about understanding that we have a choice and we always will have a choice. God gave us free will and the ability to make decisions; both good and bad. So often, we act as if we don't have any choice especially when it comes to this holy season and we act as if we have to just have to go with the flow. 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 how God has made us. We choose to say, "Yes" just like we choose to say, "No." And the best way to know when to say, "Yes" and when to say, "No" is to base our discernment out of love for God.

Today, we're going to look at that first part, growing to love God and his will for our life, and what is the very best way to do this? To help us out, we're going to look at a passage from the Gospel of St. Luke.

So, here's how St. Luke begins.

1 In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar—when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, Herod tetrarch of Galilee,

Luke 3: 1

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 grounded in history. St. Luke continues,

2 the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. 3 He went into all the country around the Jordan,

preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

Luke 3: 2, 3

The John referred to we know as John the Baptist. John the Baptist was a cousin of Jesus who had been chosen by God to be a preacher and prophet. He's considered the last and the greatest prophet of the Bible a sort of bookend from the Old Testament prophesy to the new covenant of Jesus Christ. And his message goes like this.

4 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.

5 Every valley shall be filled in, every mountain and hill made low.

The crooked roads shall become straight, the rough ways smooth.

6 And all people will see God's salvation.'

Luke 3: 4-5

Whenever a king or a powerful, important person was expected somewhere, workmen would go before him to do roadwork. They would literally smooth out the rough patches, and they would make the crooked ones straight. Generally, creating a clear, easier path for the king's arrival.

The king, John the Baptist is anticipating is his cousin, Jesus Christ, whom John recognized as the king of kings and Lord of Lords, the son of God, the long-awaited savior and messiah; the Lamb of God who is to come into the world to take away the sins of the world. 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.

Repent or repentance comes from the Greek word *Metanoia* and it means to literally change the mind – to change the way I think and or act. A change of thinking when sustained will usually lead to a change of heart – again remember from our harvest principle; little acts of virtue lead to great character. In turn, a change of heart, when sincere and sustained, is going to bring a change in behavior, in the way we make decisions, and in our choices. We know as a good father, God wants to give direction to our lives, lead us

towards what's best for us. But one thing usually stands in our way of this happening, and that one thing is sin.

Often times when we think of sin we consider sin as breaking the rules. Like breaking a law but sin is more than that; if we see sin as that we are viewing it in too narrow of a way. As we have discussed before sin literally means to miss the mark like a bowman missing the bull's eye. For a sin to truly be a sin doesn't matter if someone was hurt or offended, it's not just born of obligation or rule; and it's not an accident like I messed up - that is not the criteria we look for but rather sin is born of a decision, decision of our relationship with God. Sin is not simply breaking the rules. The heart of sin is when we say in our own hearts, "God, I know what you want and I don't care. I want what I want." Sin is clearly defiance toward God—usually in favor of self-interest. And often we think well to be defiant I have to rebel and go toe-to-toe with God but that's not how we see defiance to God. Defiance to God can simply be

borne out by saying, “God I know what you want but I don’t care, I want what I want. I just don’t care – I want what I want”; every sin comes down to this. “I know what you care about Lord, but I just don’t care I want what I want.”

We know what God wants; it’s clearly laid out in his revelation and we have three important aspects of this we have: the Bible his inerrant word, the tradition of the Church and the teaching body of the Church called the Magisterium. The good news is God has given us a way to say yes to his will again, yes to his plan, yes to his desire and what he cares about.

This is called the Sacrament of Confession or Reconciliation.

Unfortunately in my generation we didn’t hear much about this sacrament. Some priests have jokingly said that after VII, for some reason, the communion line has gotten longer and the confession line got shorter. I can’t say that for sure but we can see that there has been loss of understanding of

the sacrament and its amazing power. It’s a great sacrament, one of God’s healing and mercy, and it’s not about focusing on our guilt and shame but it’s about taking away the guilt and shame in our lives. I highly recommend if you have not been to confession in a long time – and everyone has a different definition of what is a long time is but if it’s been a while since your last confession I encourage you to not be afraid and come – as one motel chain says it so eloquently; “we’ll leave the light on for ya.” On December 12<sup>th</sup> at 7pm we will be celebrating a Penance service, one we are calling an evening of mercy and this is where we will have an opportunity to go to confession to a number of priests in from our area. It’s a great gift to be able to go to a priest and hear the words of absolution where our relationship is made right with the Lord and where we discern and choose to say yes to God again. Where our heavy heart has received repentance through his grace and mercy and where we can say our best yes by following the will of God once again.