

12/08/13 2 Advent A

-- One of the reality TV programs currently popular is *The Big Loser*. People who are very overweight and have realized they need to do something about it apply to appear on the program.

-- Those who are accepted receive personal trainers who put them through workouts, monitor their eating habits and give them motivation and encouragement. It is typically strenuous for them, both physically and mentally.

-- Still, they do this because they've reached the point where they realize they have to change. They can no longer continue on the path they've been treading—they have to change their direction.

-- There's a Greek word for this type of change, *metanoia*. And it's the same word which turns up in our gospel reading today, where it's translated *repent*. It's a change of direction, a turning away from an old and often familiar way in order to start a new way of doing things.

-- John the Baptist gave that call to *metanoia* to the Jewish people of his day. In a sense he was a personal trainer, not so much of the body as of the heart and soul. Like a good personal trainer, he gave motivation and encouragement to people who were sincere in their efforts for change.

-- But, also like a good personal trainer, he did not tolerate slackers, or those who only came to him to "look good" to others. *Produce good fruits as evidence of your repentance*, he would say to those who were less than sincere.

-- Why do we hear this in the Advent season? Unlike Lent it is not a penitential season as such. But, since it's a time of preparation, we do need to hear the call to change whatever in our life keeps us from accepting God's love fully.

-- A person exceedingly overweight knows he or she needs to change, but a person 10-20 pounds overweight may need a bit of help seeing the need to adjust eating or exercise habits.

-- We may not be aware of great sins or wrongs in our own life now. But we all need adjustments to our course of life, morally speaking. It is easy to get distracted by things that appear to be good for us but aren't in the end.

-- Advent gives us the opportunity to make those adjustments we need to make. For example, this Thursday we have the opportunity to gather together to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation (Penance) as a way to reform our ways and ready ourselves for Christ's coming.

-- God promised us through the prophet Isaiah that he would send One with the spirit of wisdom, understanding, counsel, strength, knowledge and fear of the Lord.

-- The Holy Spirit provides these things to those who seek it. Our 8th graders will learn about these gifts as they prepare for Confirmation. And all of us should seek those gifts as we ask for the Holy Spirit's guidance.

-- But we can only do so if we heed the Baptist's call to *metanoia*, a change of heart. As I mentioned last week, a man named Ignatius from Loyola in Spain did this and the world was changed.

-- May we seek to turn around what holds us back from God's love. It will change our world, and that change will reverberate to those around us—perhaps even further.