

2 Advent B SML 2017

IS 40:1-5, 9-11

MK 1:1-8

One of my favorite comedians was Victor Borge (*Bor' guh*) and one of my favorite skits of his was the one about punctuation. He would read along a passage from some familiar piece of writing, and make different humorous noises for each of the punctuation marks.

My point in mentioning Victor Borge is punctuation. In today's Gospel, John the Baptist continued where the prophets of old left off, quoting Isaiah:

The voice of one cries out comma, quote In the desert prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight period quote.

Only John the Baptist says,
the voice of one crying out in the desert comma quote
Prepare the way of the Lord period quote.

It would be funnier if Borge were doing sound effects, but my point here is not humor, but that they're different. Since Hebrew has no punctuation, we don't exactly know whose

punctuation is correct, Isaiah or John's, but move the comma, and the message completely changes.

The prophet Isaiah recorded that part of Israel's history after they returned from exile. Because God's people had been:

- ✓ unfaithful to God,
- ✓ by not following His law,
- ✓ taking advantage of the weak
- ✓ and worshipping other gods,

in 587 BC, Israel was exiled from their land and their great city of Jerusalem to a foreign land, to the land of Babylon. And there says Psalm 137, they sat, wept and waited

for almost 50 years to return to Jerusalem. But eventually, they were allowed to return to Jerusalem. So Isaiah announced:

The voice of one cries out comma, quote In the desert prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight period quote.

For Isaiah, the highway to be prepared is a highway in the desert, the desert from Babylon back to Jerusalem, so the Israelites could return to their great city.

John the Baptist took Isaiah's quote and moved the comma back three words to broaden what Isaiah said.

The voice of one crying out in the desert comma quote,
Prepare the way of the Lord period quote.

In other words, the highway is not a highway in the desert. The highway is all highways in all walks of life that would prepare ways back to the Lord, whether over the back fence or in an aisle at Kohl's. But what is even more striking is John the Baptist saw himself as the voice of ONE . . . ONE voice. And Pope Liberius, one of the first bishops of Rome to be hauled before a hostile emperor, said it best, "The truth of the faith is not lessened by the fact that I stand alone."

Renewal begins from the inside out. That applies equally to persons and societies. Every one of us, every day, must start again by following the clarion call of John the Baptist, who was a voice of ONE to be a voice of ONE: "prepare the way of the Lord." This interior act of conversion is not any empty piety; when sincere, it will always have external, public consequences. Renewal means that we must take a hard look

at how we proclaim and live our Catholic faith in this culture. And since Advent is a season of renewal, there is no better time than now.

A voice of ONE. Here's a plan; here's some food for thought. We need to keep our eyes and ears open for ICNU moments. ICNU – I see in you! I see in you a need for Jesus Christ. A short explanation is in the bulletin. But I'll give you an example.

I was in the Kohl's the other day, looking for help at the jewelry counter, and I kept running into the same woman. I was in my collar and she asked me what parish I was from. St. Mary of the Lakes. She said that's my parish.

"You need to get back to church."

"I go."

"Then how come you don't know me?"

"Because I leave early."

"Ma'am, what's your name?"

"Rose."

"Rose, I'm there before and after every Mass, and every Mass I offer."

"I light my candles."

“But that does not compare to Jesus Christ, who is the reason for every gift in your shopping cart.”

“I haven’t been well.”

“If you’re well enough to shop, you’re well enough to receive Holy Communion.”

If all I did was answer her question and said St. Mary of the Lakes, I wouldn’t be pushing the envelope as a voice of ONE like John the Baptist. So hopefully she’ll be here this weekend. Oh, wait, I see her. There she is. Rose, stand up and be recognized . . .

People, and words, make converts. This is because the Catholic faith is so much more than a set of principles we agree to, but rather an entire way of life. People need to see the Catholic way of life being lived, the joy it brings, and the union between the believer and Our Blessed Lord. I challenge all of us to be a voice of one this Christmas, inviting those who need Jesus Christ to come to Church. After Christmas, we’re going to have three Mass Mobs, also explained in the bulletin. We had one here on 9/11/16, the 15th anniversary of that tragedy and we filled the Church. There’s more information in the bulletin and there will be more information to follow.

All of us need to make an examination of conscience. We can never allow ourselves to offer an abridged version of the Gospel. We need to genuflect to the tabernacle, because genuflecting to the world is a watering down of the Gospel. And we need to be a voice of ONE.

Although Mass attendance at St. Mary of the Lakes has been on the increase for the last three years, there is still roughly 75 percent of registered parishioners who do not attend Mass weekly, so the harvest is abundant for ICNU moments.

As Pope Liberius, one of the first bishops of Rome to be hauled before a hostile emperor, said it best, “The truth of the faith is not lessened by the fact that I stand alone.” In the spirit of John the Baptist, the voice of one crying out in the desert . . . the voice of one . . . if I say I’m Catholic, I need to prove it, and so do you! Invite someone back to Church.