

One of the saddest experiences in human life is breaking someone's trust. If trust is broken it can be very hard to restore, and only the work of both parties can bring it about.

Normally, it occurs this way: Someone offends someone else. The offender, wanting to restore trust, says I'm sorry. The offended also wants to restore trust, but finds it hard to believe everything's going to be all right. So, the offended says to the offender, "Prove it. Prove to me things are going to be different now." And the offender pledges some external proof--more time with the kids, having a talk after work, whatever it may be.

Today we hear about John the Baptist. (Incidentally, do you know what John the Baptist and Atila the Hun have in common? The same middle name.) Today we meet John the Baptist doing what he does best, baptizing. And in the middle of the workday, John notices that several Pharisees and Sadducees are coming forward in response to his invitation to be baptized. John salutes them with a colorful greeting: "You brood of vipers." Thanks be to God this technique of welcoming catechumens never caught on in the Church. John is suspicious of these characters. He thinks they've broken a trust with God. And as a prophet of God John demands of them a sign to prove their sincerity: "Give some evidence," John says, "that you mean to reform."

Now John the Baptist has no equal when it comes to giving proof of his own intentions to reform, proof that he wants to keep his trust with God secure. John not only preached the need to reform, he dressed and ate in a way that let people know he was serious. He wore camel's hair and a leather belt, he ate grasshoppers and wild honey. John had a skill that most three-year olds have honed to perfection: He knew how to get attention. In his personal life, he showed externally the signs of his interior conversion. If others wanted to follow his example, he demanded proof that they were ready to restore trust in God, he demanded the proof of baptism. But with the Pharisees and Sadducees he demanded even more evidence that they meant to reform.

My brothers and sisters, John the Baptist stands before us this second Sunday of Advent to throw down a challenge: If you have had an interior conversion to prepare for the coming of the Lord in your life, let's see some evidence, show me the proof. Now, there are things we can say to John. We all came to church this morning, that should be some evidence for starters. We've sung songs, we've made peace with each other. What more could he want?

Giving evidence on the outside can help make secure the change we want on the inside. So, think about this: Is there something you want changed this Christmas, some trust that needs to be restored, with another person or with God? Are you resolved to do your part? Then give some physical evidence of your intention. Between now and Christmas, you could wear a medal, put up some special decoration at home, put some object on your desk at work. But do something as a sign that you want to reform. Then John the Baptist will welcome you to cleansing waters if you have taken steps to heal a broken trust.