

Preparing the way of the Lord

John the Baptist could be the central figure in our thoughts today. He prepared the way for the people of his time to understand the good news of their salvation. That is the way God normally works; He sends the message of salvation to us through each other. As St Paul once put it, how can people know the truth about God if they have never heard it; and how can they hear if nobody is sent to them?

Jesus found his first disciples among those who were influenced by the preaching of John the Baptist. He had showed them the value of self-control and of prayer; he urged them to listen to the inner voice of God, with repentance and a faithful heart. The high point of John's short ministry was his meeting with Jesus. Not only did he get to baptize Our Lord but he also helped some of his own followers to go with Jesus and become the first Christian disciples. Through him, Andrew and his brother Peter, and Philip and Nathanael became apostles of Jesus.

Clearly, God wishes us Christians also to help other people to know and love him. If in the first place, we were more committed to our own Christian calling, we would be more effective in influencing others towards religious commitment. Parents have the first opportunity to point their children towards God. But their words will only be effective when backed up by the actual example of their own faith and prayer.

People can influence others, for good or ill, in all sorts of ways. A special kind of influence rests with the journalists and opinion-formers who work in the media, press, radio and television and through the internet. But ordinary people outside the media can also influence the views and values of those with whom they talk and live. When looked at in light of today's Gospel, does our way of speaking and behaving in any way help others to share our values, or do we confirm their suspicion that this world is a selfish and cynical place?

And what about fostering vocations to some active form of church service? The ability of our Church to go on as a visible, organized community continuing in the prayer-life and values of Jesus is under serious question today. If people open their hearts to inspiration, Andrew and Philip and Peter, a way will be found to spread the saving message of Christ.