

The first time I ate bugs was in survival school in the high desert outside of San Diego.

Not that I wanted to. Especially not after the Lieutenant JG sitting next to me scarfed down a fuzzy moth covered in powder ... only to be told by the instructor that it might be toxic.

Anyway, we were hiding in the desert and trying to get from point A to point B, when somebody called out “Get down!” Trying to dodge the various cacti and their ever-present spines, I plopped down on what looked like a clear patch of ground.

After a couple of seconds, I was overrun with little black ants nipping and biting my arms, legs, and body. Nothing deadly. But I started swatting at them and trying to rub them off. In desperation, I bit back. They were biting me, so I ate them as retaliation.

They sort of tasted like endive. But I didn’t expect to ever have to do that again.

The next time I ate bugs was in China. Not bugs, but more like an arachnid. Deep fried scorpions to be exact. Not much taste, but quite a bit of crunch. It was supposed to be a delicacy, but it sure took some getting used to.

The last time was in Mexico. There were dead red grasshoppers and live little beetles. The beetles tasted like spice, and the grasshoppers were mostly crunch without any taste.

These days, I’ll stick to regular food. Bugs may be an acquired taste, but if there isn’t any reason to acquire it – I certainly don’t recommend it.

Today is the Second Sunday in Advent. In today’s Gospel we are introduced to the biblical character of John the Baptist. Not that he was what we would consider a ‘Baptist’ these days – that is a member of a particular reformed congregation. Rather, he was “John the Baptizer” ... that guy named “John” who hangs out by the river baptizing people.

Saint Mark describes John as wearing camel’s hair – I would guess that’s a step down from goat hair – and eating locusts and wild honey – bugs and candy.

John was living in the wilderness. Sort of a “wild man,” if you will. He wasn’t doing it because he was crazy or nuts or off his rocker, but

because it was his mission to stay close to God so that he could announce the coming of the Messiah. John camped out every day. He ate whatever he could find. He wore whatever he could find.

His life is one of voluntary poverty. Poor in the eyes of the world, but rich in God's grace and power.

When he speaks of Jesus, he says, "*I am not worthy to stoop and loosen the thongs of his sandals.*" And that "*[Jesus] will baptize ... with the Holy Spirit.*"

John proclaimed repentance, but his repentance was at most a disassociation with sin. What we might call a "firm purpose of amendment." Jesus, in instituting the Sacraments, provides everything else we may need through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Sometimes good intentions aren't enough. But the Sacraments truly effect what they signify.

The Sacrament of Reconciliation ... or Penance ... or Confession ... or whatever you may call it provides, through grace and the power of the Holy Spirit, something more than our own "firm purpose of amendment." God's grace moves us past our own limitations, and through that particular Sacrament we are restored and elevated beyond the place we were when we may have gone astray.

John's baptism was one of repentance – that is, give up your sins and be baptized.

Christian baptism requires us to "let go and let God" so that His power and His grace may take away our sins through the saving passion of Jesus Christ. It's not so much what we, ourselves, do – but rather, that we allow God's grace, Christ's gift of salvation, and the power of the Holy Spirit to act on us ... and in us ... so as to transform us.

As we approach this altar to receive the Sacred Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of Jesus Christ – let us call upon the graces of our own baptism so that we might be restored in Christ. If John's baptism and John's call for repentance were to prepare the way for Jesus' coming in ministry ... let us rely on the graces we have been given to prepare our hearts ... our minds ... and our souls ... to receive Christ ... today in the Eucharist, and in preparation for Christmas ... may He truly find a place for him ... in our hearts.