

**“... [and] they acknowledged their sins.”**

*In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.*

**Once upon a time**, Pat Williams, of the Philadelphia 76ers, told this remarkable story. He says it was a hot Sunday afternoon in 1980. A young cerebral palsy victim, named Cordell Brown, was walking through the clubhouse of the World Baseball Champion, Philadelphia Phillies.

**Cordell walks with great difficulty.**  
**Cordell talks with great difficulty.**  
**Cordell eats with great difficulty.**

*When people see Cordell coming, they usually turn the other way or pretend they don't see him. That's what some of the Phillies were doing as Cordell made his way through their clubhouse. And, what was Cordell doing there in the first place? Well, truth be told, he'd been **invited** there to speak to the players in a pregame chapel service.*

*What could Cordell Brown possibly say to stars, like Steve Carlton or Mike Schmidt, who were far removed from his world of pain & deformity? Players were asking themselves the same thing. Cordell began by putting them at ease. He said:*

**“I know I am different.”**

*And quoting St. Paul, he said,*

**“BUT, by the grace of God, I am what I am.”** <sup>1 Cor. 15:10</sup>

*Then, for the next 20 mins., Cordell Brown talked about the goodness of God in his life. He concluded by answering the question:*

**“What could he possibly say to famous superstars like Steve Carlton and Mike Schmidt, who were far removed from his world of pain and deformity?”**

*Cordell said in a gentle and loving way:*

**“You may hit 350 for a lifetime and be paid more than a \$1,000,000 a year,  
**but** when the day comes that they close the lid on that box,  
you won't be any different than I am.  
That's one time that we will be the same.  
I don't need what you have in life. **BUT**, honestly, one thing is for sure in this life...  
**you need what I have ...and that's Jesus Christ!”****

*I like that true story for **two** reasons:*

**1<sup>st</sup>**, it speaks to us clearly about the season of Advent. It invites us to return to the basics.

*It invites us to ask ourselves, “**What is really important to us?**”*

*It invites us to look at our priorities in life.*

*It invites us to ask ourselves if Jesus Christ is the first priority in our lives.*

**2<sup>nd</sup>**, it speaks to us clearly about today's Scripture readings. All 3 readings talk about the need to prepare the way for the coming of the Lord. They tell us that, if our lives are **not** what they should be, then we should do something about it.

**For example**, if we have strayed from the basics, then today's readings invite us to fix it.

**For example**, if we've placed our work ahead of our family, today's readings invite us to fix it.

**For example**, if we've placed success ahead of our relationship with God, then we should fix it.

There is a small chapel in Westminster Abbey in London called St. George Chapel. It was built as a memorial for the Londoners, who lost their lives during the air raids of WW II.

Inside the chapel, there are 4 large books. In the books are written over 60,000 names of the air raid victims. One book lies open. On it shines a light, illuminating a page of names.

Each day, the page is turned, revealing a new set of names. As one stares at the long column of names and reads them, one has no way of knowing whether the person, whose name is read, was rich or poor, black—white--or brown, Christian—Jewish—or--atheist, young/old, handsome/not.

Nor does it make any difference.

All that matters now is what each person became in the course of his or her life on this planet.

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The stories of ...Cordell Brown & of St. George Chapel lead us to ask ourselves a few questions: **"To what sort of questions do they lead us?"** you ask. **Well, I am glad you asked that question!**

They lead us to questions like:

What should we do if we find our lives are not being lived as they should be?

What should we do if we find that Jesus is not the priority he should be?

What should we do if we find that success or work is more important than family or God?

What should we do if we find that we are not prepared for the Second Coming of Jesus or our death—whichever comes first?

The answer is, of course, we should do **exactly** as St. John the Baptist advised the people of his time to do. **We should repent!** By that, I mean we should seek God's forgiveness for our sins. We should turn over a new leaf, so to speak. He died so sins could be forgiven. That's all a part of why he left us his Church—with its wonderful sacraments. (Announce Penance Service if so.)

And this brings me back to the remarkable story of Cordell Brown. What could he say to someone like Steve Carlton or Mike Schmidt—so far removed from Cordell's life of pain & deformity?

What could Cordell Brown possibly say to **you and me**?

Remember? He gave the answer in a loving, **BUT** ...in a starkly honest way:

**"You may hit 350 for a lifetime and be paid more than a \$1,000,000 a year,  
BUT... when the day comes and they close the lid on that box,  
you won't be any different than I am.  
That's ONE time we will be the SAME!  
I don't need what you have in life, BUT, & there's that proverbial BUT in life, one thing is for sure:  
You need what I have ...and that's Jesus Christ!"**

I now close with this prayer:

**"When I was a child, I laughed and wept. Then... time crept.  
When I was a youth, I became more bold. Then... I strolled.  
When I grew up, I became a man. Then... time ran.  
Finally, into a ripe old age I grew. Then... time flew.  
Soon, I shall be passing on. Then... time will be gone.  
O Jesus, when death comes, nothing will matter—but you."**

May our all-loving God, our Abba, bless you...

the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.