

**ECHOING GOD’S WORD
IN THE
CATHOLIC COMMUNITY**

**Third Sunday of Advent
December 11, 2022**

Readings:

Isaiah 35:1-6,10	The desert will bloom like paradise.
Psalms 146:6-10	God comforts those who suffer.
James 5:7-10	Lord is near; be patient in suffering.
Matthew 11:2-11	Jesus gives evidence to John the Baptist.

Matthew:

John had to hear from Jesus himself: “What’s going on? You don’t seem to be the firebrand that I had expected as a Messiah? What are you up to? Did I make a mistake in designating you as the One? You are going around with some of the same stuff I ranted and raved about: ‘Repent; the kingdom of God is near.’ But you are also very gentle and kind and caring. All this ‘love and forgiveness’ that you keep talking about sort of confuses me and my followers. Is a real Messiah going to come, or are you the right one after all? Was I wrong about you, or was I wrong about the kind of Messiah we were supposed to expect?”

John has been arrested and will shortly pay with his head on a platter for being so direct with his message. Of course, Jesus will pay his price, too, on the cross of Calvary when his time has come. Jesus apparently waits for John to have finished his mission before he begins his own.

Matthew’s community, rooted in the kind of Judaism that owed a lot to John the Baptist, had to make sense of the relationship between John and Jesus. Did Jesus ever reject John? Or John’s message? Or John’s style and tactics? Disciples of John the Baptist were probably still clinging to the memory of John and hesitating about the full message of Jesus, even up to the time Matthew was writing, around 80-85 of the Common Era (CE). Matthew had to clear up the confusion for his Church: “John is the greatest of all the prophets: he prepared the way for Jesus, the Messiah of God. He himself pointed to the works he performed as evidence that the kingdom of God had come in his life, his teaching, and his works.” (See Malachi 3:1 and Exodus 23:20).

The least born in the kingdom is greater than John. The new order of things that has been inaugurated in the ministry of Jesus surpasses all that was ever done or expected in the previous age. Who would ever have expected that God would come in person, as a human, born in time and space, to live among his people as one of them? The Christ represents an entirely new reality, an insertion of God himself into the very middle of creation. Matthew had to convince his community that God had outdone himself in generosity toward Israel, that God had overwhelmingly transcended all previous expectations and promise. To live now, in this new reality, needs to be seen as far surpassing anything done under the previous dispensation. To live after the cross and the resurrection of Jesus cannot be compared with any prior blessing that God had ever given to the world. Early Christians and today’s Christians need to be reminded of that fact.

The season that helps us prepare for the coming of the Anointed One must be taken

seriously if we are ever to realize how incredibly privileged we are to have been chosen to live in post-resurrection times. Advent has to put us in touch with the Easter events so that the true meaning of Christmas will be unveiled. In that one sentence, Matthew helps us to connect with the true source of our awesome dignity as a people of the Resurrection.

Isaiah:

For a people in Exile in Babylon, with their Temple and their Holy City of Jerusalem lying in utter ruin, with their homes devastated and reduced to a mere desert, this message of hope must have been most cheering and sustaining: That desert will break out into bloom again; they will be restored to their land. At the summit of this experience of rebirth, they will once again be able to worship their God on Mount Zion.

James:

First generation Christians were beginning to pass away and still the Lord had not yet returned. Some were beginning to falter; some began to lose hope; most were terribly impatient. They had good reason to be restless: the most horrendous persecutions assailed them from every side. What was the meaning of all this? To what purpose would they continue to hold out? The writer of the Letter of James invites them to persevere in patience. The prophet, too, had had to endure unspeakable trials.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What value is there for us in recalling the staunch, unflinching truth of John the Baptist amid the challenges of a world in which self-indulgence and sense-gratification govern most of our decisions and choices? Isn't it true that we often choose what is easy over what is right? Living in a world that is truly *soft* compared to the world in which our ancestors lived, do we still have the *moral stamina* needed to make hard choices that lead to salvation?

2. Is it true that addictions are learned as shortcuts to personal gratification rather than doing the hard work necessary for real human fulfillment? Do you think that drugs and alcohol might just be that kind of short-circuiting of the human spirit where people find a very poor substitute for God that can only be found by facing the truth about ourselves? "I am not God. I need to submit to the God who will lift me up above and beyond my very limited self."

3. What lesson is there for the Church, for your parish community, in this Gospel reading? Are we willing to make the hard choices that must be made if we are to be faithful disciples of our Crucified Lord? Does your parish prefer to be identified with the poor and the suffering rather than with those who are successful and well off? How could the parish witness more effectively to the values by which John the Baptist lived and died rather than by the self-indulgence of Herod Antipas?

SUGGESTION FOR CHRISTIAN ACTION

Pink vestments on the Third Sunday of Advent seem quite incongruous when seen against the “vestments” worn by John the Baptist! Burlap might be more appropriate! Just a suggestion!

PRAYER

**Come, Holy Spirit.
Fill the hearts of your faithful.
And enkindle in them the fire of your love.**

CATHOLIC DOCTRINE

God has not yet finished the work of our salvation in Jesus Christ. There remains much to be accomplished before it can be said that the universe has been transformed into the reality that God intends for creation. The work of the Church remains to be done if its mission is to be complete.

God has entrusted to the People of the Promise, first those of the original Israel and then to us, the New Israel, the task of making all things new for the glory of the Creator. Jesus Christ came to bring the divine hand into that work. Christ continues to work through the ministry of the Church, indeed through all persons of goodwill, toward the completion of the work of the Father. A world renewed to the splendor of its original existence as it came from the hand of its Creator must come from our hands today. Hearts made new in the transforming experience of conversion and redemption must come from the heart of Christ and from our own love as the continuation of Christ’s love.

Who will do that work if not those who have heard the message of the prophets and the Gospel of Jesus Christ? The Church hears the Gospel and puts it into practice as it lives out its mission in the world of every age and of every place. The Church cannot be anyone but ourselves who are the body of Christ and who celebrate its truth in the sacraments daily and everywhere.

Out of God’s creation itself, we take up the signs and symbols of God’s saving presence among us to celebrate and to retrieve the redeeming power of God in the world. Through sacraments, through prayer, through good works in family life, in the secular world, and in the Church, we take up the task of renewal of God’s creation in order to build a new kingdom for the glory of the Father. Jesus Christ is at work through us to this day, making all things new.

The marvel of it all is that we use the very creation of God — water, bread, wine, oil, words, human hearts, gestures and actions — to make a new creation, to transform the original creation, out of the disorder that our sins have imposed upon it and imbedded into it. All by the power of the Spirit given by Jesus Christ.

(See: The Catechism #1145-1162)

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