

3rd Sunday of Advent, “Gaudete” Sunday

I. “Are You the One Who Is To Come?”

A. From time to time, we may find ourselves alone, even isolated, perhaps cooped up at home or hospitalized. When we are alone and isolated for long periods, so many thoughts and emotions crowd in upon our minds and hearts. Questions come into our minds, questions we normally block out when we are otherwise occupied or distracted. And after we’ve been alone for a while, don’t we looking for reassurance when someone we love and trust comes to visit? We want to know how our loved ones are doing and all the latest news. And if there’s something we worried about – well, we want to know about that too.

B. Perhaps this common experience helps us understand the surprising question which the imprisoned John the Baptist asked of Jesus: “Are you the one who is to come, or should we look for another?” That question is surprising because, only a short time before, John the Baptist, the forerunner of the Messiah, had recognized Jesus as the long-awaited Messiah. Now he asks, “Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect another?” Crouched in his dark prison cell, isolated and alone with his thoughts, John the Baptist perhaps began to wonder about Jesus. Was Jesus the sort of Messiah that the people of Israel had been waiting for? Was Jesus really the Savior who would deliver his people from oppression?

II. Jesus’ Response to John’s Question

A. Jesus must have had great sympathy for the imprisoned John the Baptist, for John exemplified ‘the hardship and patience of the prophets’ (see Jas. 5: 10). Jesus, however, answered John, echoing the words of Isaiah in today’s first reading. As John the Baptist knew so well, Isaiah had prophesied that, with the coming of the Messiah, “the eyes of the blind [would] be opened, the ears of the deaf [would] be cleared; the lame [would] leap like a stage, and the tongue of the mute [would] sing” (Isaiah 35:6). So this is what Jesus said in reply to John’s question, ‘Are you the one?’

- “Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind regain their sight, the deaf hear, the dead are raised and the poor have the Good News proclaimed to them” (Mt. 11: 4-5).

B. When John the Baptist heard Jesus’ reply he must have understood that Jesus was exactly the Savior and Messiah God promised he would send. It was not merely that the holy man from Galilee was a worker of wonders; no, Jesus was doing exactly what the Prophet Isaiah said the Messiah would do. So Jesus encourages John to trust him: “Blessed is the one who takes no offence at me” - (11:6) Even in languishing in prison, even facing a grisly death, John would find untold joy and blessings by placing his faith in Jesus.

III. Jesus Christ, the Answer to Our Isolation and Doubts

A. On this 3rd Sunday of Advent, as the Feast of Christmas draws near, we are not locked in a prison cell as was John the Baptist - (though we should remember our brothers and sisters are in fact incarcerated). Yet, even if we are free from physical restraints we sometimes find ourselves in prisons of doubt or guilt or isolation. It doesn’t take a prison cell or a hospital room to experience those feelings, which weigh especially heavy on us amid the tinselly holiday season. In times of doubt or guilt or isolation, we, not unlike John may begin to wonder whether God loves us, whether he forgives our sins, whether Jesus is our Messiah. More than a few people, facing those same questions, have abandoned their faith only to find themselves facing greater doubts, greater guilt, greater isolation.

B. For, if, God forbid, we were to abandon the Faith, we would abandon the One who came into the world to bring us the Good News we have longed for our whole life long . . . the Good News that God’s truth and love is stronger than all our doubts, guilt, and isolation combined. Jesus has come to free us from those interior prisons that hinder us from God and neighbor and giving ourselves in service to others.

C. This is how we are to understand Jesus’ own description of his Messiahship: Jesus has come restore the sight not merely of our eyes but our souls by flooding us with the light of faith. He has come to pick us up after we have fallen along the way so

that we could walk again but this time walk with purpose toward faith's goal, our salvation. He has come to cleanse us not merely from a physical illness but to cleanse us from sin in the very depth of our hearts, including those habitual, deep-seated sins and sinful attitudes that make us sad. Jesus has come to open not only our ears but also our minds and hearts to the Gospel so that his Word might resonate in our hearts as we go about our daily lives. And Jesus has come to raise us from the dead – body, mind, and soul – not only in the resurrection of the dead at the end of time but each and every day when we repent of our sins and chose to live in his presence.

D. And blessed are we if, like John, we take no offence at Jesus – that is say, if acknowledge that Jesus is exactly the Savior whom God had promised and exactly the Savior we need at the very center of our lives. Jesus says as much to us the next chapters of today's Gospel. There he engages the crowds by asking them what they were looking for when they came from all around the region to see John the Baptist. Were they looking for a people pleaser, i.e., a reed swayed by the wind? John was anything but that as he bluntly demanded that people repent of their sins. Were they looking for a well-dressed celebrity ready for the red carpet? John wrapped his body in rough animal hides, & ate locusts & wild honey as his food. What were they looking for? Jesus answers his own question – they were looking for a prophet and more than a prophet: someone who would not only speak God's Word but indeed change their lives forever. Jesus is more than a prophet – he is the Savior!

E. Pope St. John Paul II often said that it is only in Jesus, the Son of God who became one of us, that we fully understand ourselves. When he visited Baltimore in 1995 and celebrated Mass at Camden Yards, Pope John Paul II proclaimed that "Jesus Christ is the answer to the question posed by every human life." Advent is a time to open our hearts to Christ as never before, to lay before him our doubts, our fears, our sins, and our sorrows. Advent is when we seek the grace to remove the obstacles we put in Christ's way so that he can illuminate and warm our hearts with his truth and love.

IV. Conclusion

A. This Sunday is called "Gaudete Sunday" – a Sunday of rejoicing, a Sunday in

which we can find and resolve to keep alive in our hearts and homes the true joy of the Gospel which Jesus came to bring. We can find that joy by entering deeply into the Holy Eucharist; we can find it by having our sins forgiven in the Sacrament of Penance and in turn by forgiving those who, in any way, have harmed or offended us; we can find that joy by looking beyond our own worries and needs and instead reaching out to others, especially to those most in need, those who cannot repay our kindness 'measure for measure.'

B. With you I pray that we will encounter the Lord more deeply in this holy season so as to celebrate his birth with a joy that endures and even grows stronger amid the challenges and setbacks of our daily life. May God bless you and keep you always in his love!