

## Second Sunday of Advent (12/6/20)

In today's Gospel we see a curious interchange between Jesus and John the Baptist. John sends a message to Jesus while John is in prison - he asks if he is the one to come or should we expect another. This seems strange since John has proclaimed him to be the Lamb of God who pointed Jesus out as the one coming after him whose sandal he was not fit to untie. He is present when the voice from heaven proclaims him as the Son of God. What does his question mean - why ask if Jesus is the real deal or if there is one coming after him?

The Church has pondered this question for centuries. Perhaps it was that John's own faith in the triumph of the Messiah was fading - or it could be that the situation did not fit his expectations. He who was the prophetic precursor to the Messiah is locked in prison, the religious authorities who know the prophecies and should be the first ones to welcome the Messiah, reject Jesus. Perhaps he thinks something does not quite seem right. He, as we sometimes, may wonder if we backed the right horse, so to speak.

Jesus does not simply reply with a "yes, I am the one" - in typical fashion for Jesus, He provides his yes with an answer that at first seems to not be answering the question, but really He inserts the simple yes inside of a capsule of teaching. Rather than just say yes, and leave John and his followers to wonder if this yes was real, Jesus seeks to bolster John's faith and the faith of his followers first so that when the great I AM is later proclaimed from Jesus, the faith to accept that truth will already be there. Jesus provides not just a yes, but the proof of the yes.

John perhaps, as many others of his day, were expecting a powerful Messiah, one who would achieve a victory over the current struggles of the day. Not unlike many in our own Church who see the action of God limited to the resolution of earthly social concerns - they were focused on God in the present and earthly. They were not looking for, and could not imagine, a more glorious and cosmic triumph. Not just a restoration of justice in a human world, or the loosing of slavery from human captors - but rather a coming of the justice of God bringing all things to righteousness, and a freeing from the power of sin and death - the great captors. John sees actions that do not seem to mirror the messiah he was looking for. He was probably just repeating the questions of many of his followers and others who heard Jesus - and it is fortunate that he did - for it provided Jesus an opportunity to give his clarifying response.

Jesus' recounts his works. The healing of the blind, the deaf the lame, the leper; also the reception of the Good News - the Gospel. In this He reminds John (and those who hear these words through the centuries) that He has a power that is not found in humans. A power over the forces of illness and unclenadliness, a power that makes Him the very subject of the Gospel. Only God could lay such a claim. What is more, these actions should have been recognized by John, his followers, the religious authorities, and us as the very signs prophesied for the end of the age and the coming of righteousness. The actions themselves are the fulfillment of prophecy, and they are in other ways prophetic in themselves - they give witness to other powers. The power to open the eyes of the spiritually blind, to open the ears of the spiritually deaf, to cleanse those whose souls are tarnished by rot and decay. Jesus goes on to proclaim John as a prophet - what's more, the prophet who was to prepare the way for the messiah. His response is packed with a meaning of who he is and a call to align expectations to fit the messiah (instead of expecting the messiah to fit our expectations).

This call comes down to us today, and we'd do well to hear it. Jesus speaks to us as He did to the messengers from John. What did you go to the desert to see? Dis you expect to see fine soft clothing (symbolic of an easy time), or a reed swaying in the wind (symbolic of a message that flexes with our whims). No. The power of John's example to us is to remind us that the Christian life is not one of ease and comfort, but of penitence, self-sacrifice, and faithful witness to the one who is to come. The power of John's example is to remind us that we hear the voice of God not in a message that changes to fit our whims and current social discourse - but rather one that carries the consistent message that Jesus passed down to the apostles.

For those who expect to dictate to the messiah who he is, for those who desire to have their life be one of personal comfort and not service and sacrifice, for those who expect the Church to flex at their whim or the whim of society - you are missing the point. Jesus shows today that He is the presence of the almighty God, He is the one prophesied from ancient times, He is the messiah who has come to save us not in the limited and earthly way that we might choose, but in a more spectacular and cosmic victory over sin and death. We would do well to hear the words of the Baptist calling us to repentance, and the words of Jesus making acclamation of who he is; and to follow in awe, wonder, and faithfulness this savior of the world.