

HOMILY – THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT “B”

“A man named John was sent from God ... to testify to the light. He was not the light but came to testify to the light. The Lord has anointed me, he has sent me to bring glad tidings to the poor, to proclaim liberty to the captives and release to the prisoners.”

These words we just heard proclaimed in the Gospel for this Third Sunday of Advent certainly should challenge us and remind us that as baptized Christians we too have a mission. We have been anointed and we too have been sent forth to testify and make straight the way of the Lord.

In a little over a week we will be celebrating the beautiful feast of the birth of Jesus – Christmas. Unlike other years, because of the Covid-19 pandemic, our church attendance may not be what we are used to seeing. Many from our parish community may be staying home and watching services that are streamed from other churches. Nevertheless, our worship space will be beautifully decorated with lights and flowers. At the baptistry steps there will be a nostalgic nativity scene. We will miss singing the familiar Christmas carols that enhance the spirit of the season. Many of the traditions we have been accustomed to at this time will be toned down because of Covid-19.

This Christmas of 2020 hopefully will lead us to be less Santa-centered and more focused on the reason for the season. Christmas 2020 offers an opportunity to remember Jesus in the little town of Bethlehem, asleep in a straw bed, surrounded by his adoring parents, being serenaded by angels, but more important, to bring Jesus to our homes, and especially into our lives. It calls us to make our homes into a manger, where Jesus will rule our hearts and fill our hearts with love, forgiveness and service.

Bringing Christ home is about building up the Kingdom of God. In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus announced to all who would hear that his mission was to care for the poor, the oppressed, the imprisoned, to make a difference in the world, to set things right. This is the mission we were anointed for at our baptism.

Let me try to illustrate this point by referring to what many consider the first Christmas card sent in 1843 by a man named Sir Henry Cole, an Englishman. He commissioned a card that would express his greetings for the holidays. The first Christmas card was small, about three by five inches. But what was significant was its design. It was divided into three panels. The central panel showed a joyful family gathering around an abundant table. Underneath the scene was written: “A Merry Christmas and Happy New Year to You.” But this central panel was framed by two other panels. On the left was a scene of the hungry being fed and on the right was a panel of the poor being clothed. The first Christmas card knew that Christmas was about taking Jesus into the world of the poor and suffering.

May the Spirit of God come upon us and may we bring light to those who live in poverty and darkness. We are the men and women sent by God to bring glad tidings to the poor. May we work as committed followers of Christ to prepare the way for the Lord and make straight his path. When we come to adore the child Jesus on his birthday, may we, by our actions and imitation of Jesus, bring light, hope and peace to the world.

As I read the words from the Gospel again, I want you in silence to say your name in place of John the Baptist's name and hear what your mission is on this Third Sunday of Advent.

“A man named (John) was sent from God ... to testify to the light. He was not the light but came to testify to the light through Baptism and Confirmation. The Lord has anointed me, he has sent me to bring glad tidings to the poor, to honor and love my family, to witness to the world my faith and lead others to follow the teachings and example of Christ.”