

Homily Note Resources 12/15/2019 Third Sunday of Advent A

Readings: Isa 35:1-6a, 10; James 5:7-10; Mt 11:2-11

1. Summary: John the Baptist came as a prophet, one who was to call people to repent of their sins. Isaiah prophesies the richness of the blessings of the Lord and the healing which occurs when the way of the Lord is prepared. James urges repeatedly a willingness to be patient, another way of calling for deferred, not immediate, gratification. In the Gospel, Jesus encourages John to accept his ministry of preaching and healing, and this is in the most practical and daily aspects of life. How does this apply to us today?

2. The readings: The prophet Isaiah, in the **first** reading, encourages the exiled Jews in Babylon to rejoice because their God is going to liberate them from slavery and lead them safely to their homeland. This anticipates how God will liberate us from the slavery of sin and lead us to the happiness and fulfillment of His kingdom.

3. In the second reading, James encourages the early Christians to rejoice and wait with patience for the imminent second coming of Jesus. Reminder, God's blessings come in the long run, often not immediately.

4. In today's Gospel, Jesus encourages John the Baptist in prison to rejoice by accepting Jesus's ministry of preaching and healing as showing him to be the anticipated Messiah. Matthew presents Jesus, the true Messiah, paying the highest compliments to John the Baptist as his herald and the last of the prophets, and giving special credit to the courage of John's prophetic convictions. We should remember that John was beheaded because of his criticism of the immoral and illegal marriage of King Herod to Herodias, wife of his brother, Phillip. John had criticized a relationship of lust and power.

5. "If ever there was proof that sin brings its own punishment, that proof lies in the story of Herod. It was an evil day when Herod first seduced Herodias. From that act of infidelity came the murder of John, and in the end disaster, in which he lost all, except the woman who loved him and ruined him" (Wm Barclay).

6. John the Baptist called the people to practical, real repentance. This is most clear in the Gospel of Luke, chapter 3. To the crowds he said, "Whoever has two cloaks should share with the person who has one. And whoever has food should do likewise." To tax collectors, "Stop collecting more than what is prescribed." To soldiers, "Do not practice extortion, do not falsely accuse anyone, and be satisfied with your wages" (Luke 3).

7. Sexuality and marriage, a critical and timely issue. In our culture, is it not true that we truly need a correct understanding of the sacredness and of the power of our sexuality and how to direct it so as to lead to happiness, joy, and stability in our marriages and family? I was so encouraged by the group of Deacon candidates for the Diocese of Fort Worth. Married deacons can have a real sense of calling to help sustaining marriages.

8) Dreams for sale: There is a wonderful parable that tells us what "prophecy actualized" might look like in our lives. There was once a woman who was disappointed, who was disillusioned and depressed. She wanted a good world, a peaceful world, and she wanted to be a good person. But the newspaper and television showed her how far we were from such a reality. So she decided to go shopping. She went to the mall and wandered into a new store - where the person behind the counter looked strangely like Jesus. Gathering up her courage she went up to the counter and asked, "Are you Jesus?" "Well, yes, I am," the man answered. "Do you work here?" "Actually," Jesus responded, "I own the store. You are free to wander up and down the aisles, see what it is I sell, and then make a list of what you want. When you are finished, come back here, and we'll see what we can do for you." So, the woman did just that. And what she saw thrilled her. There was peace on earth, no more war, no hunger or poverty, peace in families, no more drugs, harmony, clean air. She wrote furiously and finally approached the counter, handing a long list to Jesus. He skimmed the paper, and then smiling at her said, "No problem." Reaching under the counter, he grabbed some packets and laid them out on the counter. Confused, she asked, "What are these?" Jesus replied: "These are seed packets. Surprised the woman blurted out, "You mean I don't get the finished product?" "No," Jesus gently responded. "This is a place of dreams. You come and see what it looks like, and I give you the seeds. Then you plant the seeds. You go home and nurture them and help them to grow and someone else reaps the benefits." "Oh," she said, deeply disappointed in Jesus. Then she turned around and left the store without buying anything. [F. and M. Brussat, editors, *Spiritual Literacy: Reading the Sacred in Everyday Life* (New York: Scribner, 1996), p. 359.]

9. Our Gospel passage for today speaks to us about our calling as Christians in a world terribly confused about values, of violence, increasing poverty, terrorism and intolerance. As disciples of Jesus, our text for today is calling us to actualize Jesus' passionate dream of a whole and healed world. So, my friends, let's pick up those packets of seeds. I would submit to you that the seeds are found in the Christian faith, in the Bible and in the Church. And let's plant them - for the sake of our children and all the children of the world.