

Third Sunday of Advent B/2017

The readings of this third Sunday of Advent talk about the joy of the coming of the Lord. They invite us to rejoice, because the Lord we were waiting for and for whom we were preparing, is about to come.

In the first reading, Isaiah describes his mission to the people of Israel. He states it as that of bringing joy to the people and that of announcing to them the end of their distress and the beginning of their liberation. He compares the joy of what the Lord has done for him to the joy that comes out of the soil when it brings forth plants.

This text allows us to understand what is at stake in today's Gospel as it talks about John the Baptist and his witness. First all, the Gospel starts by saying that John was sent by God in order to bear witness to the light so that all might believe through him.

Then, it gives the content of the witness of John. It refers in particular to the witness he gave to the Jews sent from Jerusalem by the Priests and the Levites to ask him about his identity. It shows that in his answer, John did not pretend to be the Christ or Elijah or one of the prophets, but simply a voice that invites people to prepare the way of the Lord.

It also shows the honesty of John who recognized that while he was baptizing with water, the one coming after him was greater than he was, to the point that he was unworthy of untying his sandals. Finally, the Gospel gives the location of the River Jordan as the place from where John was performing his ministry.

What do we learn from this Gospel? Today I want to talk about the joy of the coming of the Lord. In fact, with the time of Advent, we have started a journey that leads us to the feast of Christmas. In the first step of this journey, we were invited to wait for the Lord with patience and vigilance. The second step of our journey has invited us to prepare the way for the Lord, to make straight our hearts by filling in the valleys and holes of our life for the Lord to walk on our path. We come today to the third step of our journey. This step invites us to rejoice, because the Lord is closer to us than ever, he is about to come.

In the ordinary life, indeed, people rejoice when the positive experiences of life prevail over the negative ones, when happiness prevails over sadness, smiles over tears, laughter over sorrow and the expectations are met.

Jesus was sent by the Father to the world precisely in order to fulfill human expectations of happiness and joy. Jesus is our hope and our salvation. Because of him, we have the assurance of our eternal salvation. The reason why we, as Christians, have to rejoice is precisely because of the presence of Jesus who is the continuing power of God in the world. He comes in order to set us free from the power of sin.

Jesus himself has made his the words of the prophet Isaiah who says that he has been anointed by God with his Spirit in order to bring glad tidings to the poor, to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberation to the captives and freedom to the prisoners.

The witness of John confirms that Jesus is the Messiah promised and awaited. In fact, when someone is summoned to court as a witness, he is expected to tell the truth so that he helps the judge and the jurors to come to a fair verdict about the matter they are examining.

When John the Baptist says that he was sent in order to testify to the light, he is inviting us to believe in Jesus and to accept the truth he tells us about him. In fact, Jesus is the light of the world without which we will permanently live in darkness. Like a house without light remains in darkness, so are we when Jesus is not with us and we do not side with him. We need Jesus in order to live in God's light. We need to embrace him and his words in order for his light to surround us.

John the Baptist is not the Christ, or Elijah or one of the prophets, but rather an instrument used by God in order to point out to Jesus. He is just a simple messenger whose duty is to transmit a message about Jesus. In that perspective, it makes sense why he says that he is the voice that cries in the desert, inviting people to prepare the way for the Lord. The role of a voice is to convey a message. Once the message is received, the voice disappears. That is why it was not John who was important, but rather Jesus he was preaching.

Like John, we too are God's instruments for the salvation of our fellows. God wants to reach out to many people through our ministry. God needs us so that we work for him, for the salvation of our fellows. However, as important as our ministry might be, it is not about us, but rather about Jesus. We can never substitute ourselves for the place of Jesus, as though we were preaching about ourselves.

All of us, priests, deacons, catechists, are just simple workers of the Lord. Whatever might be our eloquence, our dedication to the work of the Lord and knowledge of the things of God, we are just simple servants of the Lord. We do only what is required of us. That is why we have to help the people of God to fix their eyes not on us, but on Jesus, the light of the world. This Advent, at the example of John the Baptist, we have to rethink our role with regard to the way we work with the people of God, each one according to the ministry in which he is involved.

We do not need to be blind to the presence of Jesus among us. The people of Israel waited a long time for the fulfillment of the promise of the Messiah made to them by God. But when Jesus came, they did not recognize him: "There is one among you whom you do not recognize", John says. If we do not change our life, if we hold to our habits and do not see the necessity of taking advantage of Advent in order to bring fresh air of God into our life, we also run the risk of falling into the same trap like the Israelites.

Let us pray, then, that the Lord may help us to listen to Jesus, the light of the world. Let us listen to the witness of John the Baptist and believe in Jesus. May God bless you all!

Isaiah 61: 1-2a, 10-11; 1 Thessalonians 5: 16-24; John 1: 6-8, 19-28

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