

The Third Sunday in Advent

Hymns: 63, 408, 398, 74

The INTROIT

(Phil.4:4-6; Ps.85:1)

P: Rejoice in the Lord alway:

C: and again I say, Rejoice.

P: Let your moderation be known unto all men:

C: the Lord is at hand.

P: Be careful for nothing;

C: but in everything, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God.

P: Lord, Thou hast been favorable unto Thy land:

C: Thou hast brought back the captivity of Jacob.

(The "Gloria in Excelsis" is omitted during the Penitential Season of Advent)

The COLLECT

Lord, we beseech Thee, give ear to our prayers and lighten the darkness of our hearts by Thy visitation; who livest and reignest with the Father and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.

The FIRST LESSON

Malachi 3:1-6 (KJV)

Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the LORD of hosts.

But who may abide the day of his coming? And who shall stand when he appeareth? For he is like a refiner's fire, and like fullers' soap: And he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver: and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the LORD an offering in righteousness.

Then shall the offering of Judah and Jerusalem be pleasant unto the LORD, as in the days of old, and as in former years. And I will come near to you to judgment; and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, and against the adulterers, and against false swearers, and against those that oppress the hireling in his wages, the widow, and the fatherless, and that turn aside the stranger from his right, and fear not me, saith the LORD of hosts.

For I am the LORD, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed.

The GRADUAL

(Ps. 80:1-2)

P:/C: Thou that dwellest between the cherubim, shine forth, stir up Thy strength and come.

P:/C: Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, Thou that leadest Joseph like a flock. Alleluia!
Alleluia!

P:/C: Stir up Thy strength, and come and save us. Alleluia!

Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful. But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment: yea, I judge not mine own self. For I know nothing by myself; yet am I not hereby justified: but he that judgeth me is the Lord. Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God.

The SENTENCE for the Season

(Psalm 25:6)

P:/C: Hallelujah! Remember, O Lord, Thy tender mercies: **for they have been ever of old.**
Hallelujah!

The HOLY GOSPEL

St. Matthew 11:2-10 (KJV)

Now when John had heard in the prison the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples, And said unto him, Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?

Jesus answered and said unto them, Go and shew John again those things which ye do hear and see: The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them. And blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me.

And as they departed, Jesus began to say unto the multitudes concerning John, What went ye out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken with the wind? But what went ye out for to see? A man clothed in soft raiment? Behold, they that wear soft clothing are in kings' houses. But what went ye out for to see? A prophet? Yea, I say unto you, and more than a prophet. For this is he, of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee.

και μακαριος εστιν ος εαν μη σκανδαλισθη εν εμοι

Matthew 11:2-10 — “Or Another Do We Look Toward”

INTRODUCTION

- I. YOU ARE THE COMING ONE, OR ANOTHER DO WE LOOK TOWARD
- II. BLESSED IS HE, WHOSOEVER SHALL NOT BE OFFENDED IN ME
- III. WHO WILL PREPARE YOUR WAY BEFORE YOU

CONCLUSION

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Matthew 11:2-10 — “Or Another Do We Look Toward”

Grace, mercy, and peace to you all from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
Amen.

The sermon text is the Gospel reading appointed for the Third Sunday in Advent,
Matthew 11:2-10:

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In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

INTRODUCTION

Do you have a favorite passage from the Holy Scriptures? For myself, I cannot point to one in particular as my favorite. However, today's text is certainly one that we should embrace as a treasure. Surely this is a text that speaks to each of us personally. For in this account we see in the person of John what we need to see in ourselves. In the person of John we behold a truly marvelous example of what it really means to be a Christian. Moreover, we also see what it means to be a true witness unto Christ and the faith by which Christ makes us to see what we are unable by any other means to see.

I. YOU ARE THE COMING ONE, OR ANOTHER DO WE LOOK TOWARD

Surely we all can relate to John. This dear saint displays the doubts and fears that we encounter in our daily lives. He displays the questions that we all ask regarding the seemingly odd ways through which the Lord works. Truly John displays the fact that the Lord's ways are not our ways and the Lord's thoughts are not our thoughts.

Dear John is in King Herod's dungeon. Why? John would not shut his mouth. John continued to cry out in love to the king regarding the king's compromise of the faith. John kept crying out with the warnings that the leaders of the people and that the leaders of the Church did not want to hear. He kept crying out. He simply would not let well enough alone. He was in

their face. He did not simply preach the truth to those who came to him, but he also continually cried out with urgent warnings against those who embraced their own versions of the truth and applied the Word of God as they determined for themselves. In their minds, he kept attacking everyone who did not agree with him. Finally the king commanded that John be arrested and locked away in the dungeon.

What sort of way is this for one who is preaching faithfully the message that the Lord gave to him to preach? Why did the Lord allow his faithful servant to be treated this way? Surely at first John remembered that this is always the way that the hard-hearted deal with the preachers of Christ. Surely at first John simply continued worshiping the Lord and giving thanks for the means of grace that he had received for all of his life. Surely at first John simply continued trusting that these were sufficient for him.

But how long was John locked away? How long was he unable to partake of the blessings of God's house? Moreover, how long would it be before Jesus, the Christ, would accomplish the restoration of righteousness? How long would Jesus ignore the fact that John was languishing in the dungeon? How long would Jesus allow this injustice to continue, doing nothing to vindicate His faithful servant?

Surely we can relate to John's reaction. John sent two of his disciples through whom John said to Jesus, **"You are the coming one, or another we look toward."**

Dear John was hurting. He felt abandoned. He felt alone. By all that he could see from his imprisonment, he was alone. Moreover, the hypocrites still ruled the temple. The vast majority of the people were still being taught a compromised Gospel that was leading them to trust a false faith. Nothing seemed to be changing. The faithful still were being treated as outcasts. The wicked still were growing in power.

John's faith was weakening. His confidence was faltering. So what did John do? He turned to Jesus. Interestingly, the text does not actually present John's words in the form of a question, but as a statement. Certainly his doubts are being presented to the Lord, but in a way that may seem odd to us. He does not really ask whether or not Jesus is the coming one. He does not really ask whether those who are looking for the Lord's anointed one or Christ should look for another. Rather he says, **"You are the coming one, or another we look toward."**

What John is really saying is that he believes that Jesus is the coming one and that he needs to hear it again for himself so that he does not look toward another Christ. By this, the one who boldly preached Christ crucified cries out now not on behalf of others but on behalf of himself. He cries out confessing the weakness of his own sinful flesh. He cries out in fear that his heart will crumble. He cries out that he needs to hear again the Gospel into which he had been circumcised and then baptized. He cries out that he needs to be renewed in the faith that he had so boldly proclaimed.

Interestingly, Matthew informs us that the cause of John doing this was that he heard in prison the works of Christ. Notice that it was not his own faith that motivated John to come to Jesus. John did not approach the Lord for help on account of what he believed. Rather, it was the hearing of the works of Christ that caused him to remember the one in whom all hope is found. It was hearing the works of Christ that caused John to cry out to Jesus for help. It was hearing the works of Christ that moved John to send to Jesus so that Jesus could restore him to true faith. And so John confessed, **"You are the coming one, or another we look toward."** John confessed his need to be confirmed yet again in the true faith that is in Jesus.

II. BLESSED IS HE, WHOSOEVER SHALL NOT BE OFFENDED IN ME

Jesus answered and said unto them, Go and shew John again those things which ye do hear and see: The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them. And blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me.

It was the works of Christ that drew John to Jesus for help. Hearing John's plea, Jesus confirms that He is indeed the Christ. How does Jesus confirm this? He directs John and all who were listening to the works of the Christ. Jesus did this by quoting the Scriptures, which foretold the very things that Jesus was doing. John's disciples told John about the works of Christ. John responded by sending to Jesus for a word of comfort and assurance. Jesus sends to John the same word that John had preached faithfully and without compromise. Jesus gave John nothing new. Jesus gave John no special interpretation or application of the Scriptures. Jesus simply told John's disciples to shew to John the pure Gospel and the pure means of grace.

Jesus knew what John needed. John also knew what he needed. That is why John sent to hear from Jesus. Through the messengers, Jesus did come to John in prison. Jesus sent the Word, and since Jesus IS the Word, Jesus was present with John in his sufferings.

All the things that the prophets foretold, all the things that John reiterated, Jesus was fulfilling. This was happening during John's lifetime. John was hearing of it. John was comforted and strengthened. And in seeing and hearing, John's disciples also were comforted and strengthened, even as we see and hear the works of Christ and are comforted and strengthened today.

Sadly, however, very few are willing to be satisfied by the works of Jesus. This was true in John's day, and it is true in our day. It is only by God's grace that anyone ever looks to the works of Jesus as sufficient.

Imagine if John had turned to someone other than Jesus for his answer? Would any of the church leaders of his day have preached the works of Jesus to John? Would the Sadducees, or the Pharisees, or the Scribes have directed John to the works of Jesus? They were all too busy teaching people how to live as good Christians. What about John's disciples? They were looking to John. This is why Jesus gave as the ultimate answer, **"And blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me."**

Literally Jesus says, **"And blessed is he, whosoever should not be scandalized or tripped up in Me."** It is not merely a matter of being offended because of Jesus, although having our sensibilities offended certainly is a cause of stumbling. If we pay close attention to these words of Jesus we will hear that He is not telling us that we need to be careful so that we do not stumble. He says that in Him we are blessed because in Him we will not stumble. It is purely by His blessing or grace that we do not stumble. It is purely by our baptism into Him that we are kept from the scandal that causes us to doubt and to look for another way.

Jesus was assuring John that John was safe. And what was the assurance that Jesus gave to John? The assurance was that John was in Jesus and was therefore a true recipient of the works of Christ, even though nothing else in John's life seemed to show it. The word for scandal or offense is a snare that is used to catch animals, birds in particular, by their feet. John was snared in prison. Yet because of being united in Jesus through the faith of the baptism that John

preached, John was not tripped up. Rather, when he felt the grip of doubt and fear tightening around him, John looked to Jesus and received the works of Christ and was kept safe.

III. WHO WILL PREPARE YOUR WAY BEFORE YOU

Jesus rejoiced in John's repentance. All of heaven rejoiced in John's repentance. John experienced doubt and fear and he repented to Jesus. He turned from his doubts and fears to the one who takes all these things in exchange for the purity of the Gospel. John confessed his sins of doubt and fear, and Jesus preached the means of grace. Then Jesus turned to the crowds and held before them John's life as an example of a life of true faith. Jesus turned to the crowds and affirmed that John was a true prophet, and more than a prophet. He turned to the crowds and told them that what they saw in John is the true way of salvation.

Jesus quotes Malachi regarding the promise of the way of salvation. The way of salvation is not the way of proclaiming what we must do. The way of salvation is not the way of seeking to be righteous and good. The way of salvation is not the way of seeking to be witnesses unto Jesus. The way of salvation is Jesus, the flesh and blood Jesus, who is the Seed promised to be born of the woman, born to take the sin of the world.

Jesus points to John, who points to Jesus. The way of salvation comes by the Gospel. Jesus is the Gospel. Jesus is salvation. Jesus is forgiveness and peace and hope and joy. Jesus is God in the flesh, who comes to us to take our sin of doubt and fear and unbelief and bear it for us. In the next verse after our text, Jesus says, **"There has not risen in those born of women a greater than John the Baptizer, but the least in the kingdom of heaven greater of him is."**

Who is the least in the kingdom of heaven? Who is the one who descended from heaven to take the form of a servant? Who humbled himself unto death, even the death of the cross, in order to be the redemption of all the sinful world? Who suffered being made to be sin for us? Who continues to stand before the throne of God, taking our judgment and making peace our inheritance?

Jesus points to John as the greatest of all the prophets. And why was John the greatest? Because of what we just heard about John. He was the one who prepared the way for the Lord to come through the ministry of the Christ. With all that he was, with every aspect of his life, from his birth to his ministry in the wilderness to his cry for help from prison, John looked to Jesus as the Christ and directed the entire world to depend solely upon the works of Jesus. John's testimony continues to reach through time even to us today. **"Behold the Lamb of God, who is taking the sin of the world."**

CONCLUSION

Truly this is a marvelous text for the season of Advent. Is it any wonder that it has been appointed during this time that we look to the coming of Christ in the Mass, Christmas? What else is this season about than the preaching of Baptism for the forgiveness of sins so that we may be named in the book of life and reconciled to God in His Holy Communion? Truly the testimony of John by which he prepares the way for Jesus is still the testimony for this day, **"Behold the Lamb of God, who is taking the sin of the world."**

Truly, just as dear St. John the Baptizer preached the means of grace as the way through which Christ is received, even so Jesus continues to come to us through these marvelous means. Surely through Baptism and the Supper Jesus continues to be the Lamb of God who is coming to

take the sin of the world, the same sin that we each have inhering to our flesh which we have from Adam. Surely we face the same sin of doubts and fears that John faced. Surely even as he turned to the works of Christ for His confidence and hope, we also may rely upon Christ's works applied to us in His Church through the means of grace that have been preserved for us through the pure doctrine of the apostles. Is this not reason for us to fall on our knees in thanksgiving at the Holy Table of God's grace in Christ? Is this not reason to rise up from confession and absolution to partake of the body and blood of Jesus, given and shed for our union in His body through the forgiveness of our sins? Surely our Sin, our stubborn refusal to trust God, is our cause of stumbling. Truly, even as our Lord preached to John in prison, **“And blessed is he, whosoever should not be tripped up in Me.”** In the name of Jesus, as we gather to Him through the power of His Holy Name, gathering to receive Him through the means that He Himself has ordained for His Church on earth in connection with the authority of His Name, in Him we shall not be tripped up. Surely there is no other name by which men can receive salvation. Surely there is no other toward whom we must look. In Him, in connection with His means of grace, we are everlastingly safe. In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus forever. Amen.