

The Third Sunday in Advent

Hymns: 64, 63, 408, 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.

Matthew 11:2-10 — “More than a Prophet”

INTRODUCTION

- I. NOW WHEN JOHN HAD HEARD IN THE PRISON THE WORKS OF CHRIST
- II. WHAT WENT YE OUT INTO THE WILDERNESS TO SEE?
- III. MORE THAN A PROPHET

CONCLUSION

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Matthew 11:2-10 — “More than a Prophet”

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

Today is the Third Sunday in Advent and the appointed reading of the Gospel is Matthew 11:2-10:

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.

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

INTRODUCTION

As we draw ever nearer to the celebration of the Christ Mass, the texts draw us ever more deeply into understanding the truth regarding sainthood. Today our text calls our attention to a very dear saint, St. John the Baptist. He stands as an everlasting example to us of what it means to be a saint of God and a true servant in the kingdom of God. St. John the Baptist stands as an example for the Church of God on earth.

I. NOW WHEN JOHN HAD HEARD IN THE PRISON THE WORKS OF CHRIST

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?

John is in prison. Actually, John is in a dungeon. John is not in prison, as we provide for our prisoners today. He is in King Herod's dungeon. It is not a clean place. It is dark and damp and cold and unpleasant. Why is he there? He spoke out against the king's sinful life. He called the king to repent of his willful sins of adultery and other sins. John was in prison because the king did not want to hear him anymore. John had been locked up to shut him up.

But John was the forerunner of the Christ. He was the promised one to prepare the way of the LORD to come to His people. John was filled with the Holy Spirit even from his conception in his mother's womb. He was prophesied of old. He was sent by God in the spirit of Elijah.

Now this mighty man of God, this servant of the Word, this prophet who pointed to the Lamb of God who takes the sin of the world, is languishing in a dungeon and begins to wonder about this Jesus to whom he had directed others to follow. John began to doubt.

After all, is this what is to happen to the LORD's faithful people? Moreover, is not the Christ supposed to make things right? The world's sin did not disappear. The evil king still ruled. The wicked and unbelieving Romans still oppressed Israel and the world. Injustice still prevailed. Where is the coming of the kingdom of God?

Matthew records that John had been hearing in the dungeon the works of the Christ. It was upon hearing of these works that Jesus was doing that John began to doubt. After all, where was the great revival of the Church? Were the people repenting of their sins? Some, but not everyone. What about the leaders of the Church? They were not welcoming Jesus. They were trying to discredit Jesus. They were continuing in their hypocrisy. The Spirit had caused John to preach that the Christ would sift the wheat from the chaff and would bring judgment upon unrighteousness.

John sends two of his disciples to Jesus to ask, "**Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?**" John was hurting. John was beginning to doubt the very things that the Holy Spirit had moved him to preach.

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.

John begins to doubt. He asks for a word of assurance. What does Jesus give John? He sends back a word of rebuke. "**And blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me.**" He tells John to believe the Word of God that John had heretofore faithfully preached to others. John asked for a sign. Jesus sent back the words of the creeds that John had taught.

This is how it is. The Church will be viewed in this way until the Lord Jesus returns. The true Church will continue to be persecuted and despised and mocked and ignored and abandoned. The politicians will continue seemingly to get away with their deceptions. The church bodies and their leaders will continue to build kingdoms for themselves, pretending to be preaching Christ, while establishing their own rule over the people. The faithful will continue to be counted as outcasts and ignored or worse if they keep calling out against what is wrong. And when the dear saints begin to doubt the Word themselves, the Lord will rebuke them. He will continue to direct them only to the pure administration of the means of grace and to the promise that this is what they really need. And the saints will daily hear the Lord's rebuke and repent and turn again to confess the true faith and be built up in it.

II. WHAT WENT YE OUT INTO THE WILDERNESS TO SEE?

And as they departed, Jesus began to say unto the multitudes concerning John, What went ye out into the wilderness to see?

John's disciples had come with the question that John commissioned them to ask. It is a disturbing question. Jesus sent back the answer that John needed to hear. Jesus rebuked John's unbelief and called John back to faith. But to the multitudes, more needed to be said.

These were the same people that previously had gone out to hear John. John pointed to Jesus. The multitudes listened to John and began going out to hear Jesus. But now John himself doubted. So Jesus asks the multitudes, **"What went ye out into the wilderness to see?"**

Why did the people go out to listen to John and to be baptized by him? They went out because of the promise that had been spoken through the prophets. They went out because of the promise that was given to Zacharias, the promise that he did not believe and needed to hear the Lord's rebuke to call him back to faith. But the promise was given and affirmed with the rebuke and then with the conception of John and his birth and the name given by the angel. This promise was that John would be a great prophet to point to the greater one who would follow. Jesus did follow by a few months, six in fact.

"What went ye out into the wilderness to see?" The people went out into the wilderness to see the fulfillment of God's promises. Their church leaders were not preaching these things. They had to go out to John in the wilderness. They turned aside from their leaders to John in the wilderness, because John spoke of true repentance and true faith. John baptized for the forgiveness of sins.

Indeed, **"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."**

This is quite a revealing question following upon what the multitudes had just seen and heard from the disciples of John. When the people went out to hear John preach they did not go out to hear the reed shaking in the wind that they just heard about. John's current display of weakness was not to be permitted to be the focus. Jesus called the people to remember what they went out to see and to hear. John's ministry was truly powerful. Why? Because he pointed to the Christ, to Jesus. He directed people to the truth of the Gospel. He preached repentance unto the true faith.

When the people went out to see and to hear John, they did not go to a crystal cathedral or to a contemporary service with praise bands and big screens. Neither did they go to a big traditional temple or cathedral where the ministers were dressed in expensive albs and robes. They did not go to the king's palace or to the governor's mansion. They went out into the wilderness to hear a very austere man, dressed in coarse clothing and living quite the opposite from what the rest of the world sought after. He preached a message that did not appeal to people. He directed people to confess their sins and to be baptized into the forgiveness of Christ crucified. He told the people that they were no good and that all of their best efforts were no good. He taught them to despair of their own righteousness and to be baptized into the one who is righteousness. He taught them to abandon all that they had achieved for themselves and to turn in faith to trust what God in Christ was working for them.

John was the exact opposite of all that people ordinarily seek after. John was the opposite of what the big time evangelists are. Yet John is the one to whom the people went out into the wilderness to see and to hear.

III. MORE THAN A PROPHET

Jesus explains this further, saying:

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.

John was the last and greatest of the Old Testament prophets. But he was even more than a prophet. He was the one of whom the prophets prophesied regarding the one who would prepare the people to receive the LORD. John did more than to foretell the coming of Jesus, the Christ. John prepared the way for Jesus. John went out into the wilderness and called the people away from what they had been following. He called them away from the theology of glory. He called them away from the hypocrisy of the chief priests and the scribes and the Pharisees. He called them away from the mere following of tradition. He called them away from the happy lights of Christmas to the preparatory days of Advent.

John called the people away from the manger and away from the star of Bethlehem and away from the giving of gifts and away from the Christmas trees and away from the cute children in Christmas pageants and away from the turkey and cranberry sauce. John called the people out into the wilderness to face their sinful unbelief and their need to be baptized into Christ Jesus. He was more than a prophet. He was the messenger who was sent before the appearing of Jesus. He was the one who would actually baptize Jesus into His ministry of salvation for all to see for all time!

Oh yes! The ministry of John is unmatched in the history of the world, until the least in the kingdom of heaven began His ministry. Yes, Jesus is the one who is greater than John. Yet Jesus is also the one who was made to be least in the kingdom of heaven, as He declares in the verse immediately following our text. **“Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.”**

Yes, the one who is greater than John was made to be the very least in the kingdom of heaven. John suffered the disgrace of having his ministry stripped from him in the darkness of the king’s dungeon. But Jesus suffered the disgrace of the sin of the world, being stripped of all dignity, condemned as a criminal, even as a blasphemer. He was condemned not as a speaker of the truth, as John was, but as one who blasphemed against the truth of God. He was stripped of His title and of his life. He was crucified as one cursed by God. He was made to be sin and died as a sinner, not only one sinner, but as all sinners. No one has ever been brought lower. No one in the kingdom of heaven has ever been counted as less.

It is to this one that John pointed. It is to this one that John declared himself unworthy to loose the sandal strap. It is to this one that John said **“I am unworthy!”** This is the ministry of John. It is to this one that the multitudes went out into the wilderness to hear. And today, all true Christians do likewise.

CONCLUSION

John was truly more than a prophet. He was greater than Moses. For Moses did worse than to doubt Jesus. Moses struck the Rock and claimed to give the people water on his own. John called the people to the water and baptized them into Christ. Elijah called down fire from heaven and prayed for a drought and then for water from heaven. John led the people to the water of life to receive the one from heaven by means of this water. John truly prepared the way for Jesus, who still comes to us today by means of water and the Spirit. John prepared the way for what Jesus completed when He instituted the New Testament in His blood. Today, baptized into Christ's body, we come to the feast and eat and drink forgiveness and everlasting life. We confess this one true faith as members of Christ in His body and we are united as one in Him. The ministry of John was truly the greatest of all of the Old Testament. He prepared the way for the New Testament, of which we have been made partakers today. This is the preparation of the season of Advent. This is the preparation for the reception of the New Testament in Christ's blood. Truly, by God's grace, through the baptism that John preached and has been fulfilled with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, we stand fully prepared to receive Jesus in the Holy Communion today. Thanks be to God! 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.