

Third Sunday of Advent – 2022 A

Each Christmas, we marvel that Jesus did not enter human history as we might expect the coming of God to be – not in power or glory or fame, but a helpless infant and a borrowed manger. John the Baptist prepared the way for Him even in that path of humility – not a palace, but the desert; not worldly enjoyments but locusts and wild honey; not fine clothes but camel’s hair. Mother Teresa understood this self-emptying not only in her own life but also in the lives of those she served, the dignity of a child of God under what she often called Christ’s distressing disguise in the poor, the sick, the outcast. She once shared this story: ***“A man told me one day that not even for a million dollars would he touch a leper. I responded, ‘Neither would I. If it were a matter of money, I would not do it even for two million. However, I do it gladly for the love of God.’”***

“Are you He Who is to come, or do we look for another?” This is John’s question from prison, and our question whenever we feel imprisoned by doubt and our faith is tested by the troubles of our world, our families, our Church, our own spirits. Is it really Jesus under whatever distressing disguises in which we encounter Him? John was in prison because he had challenged Herod the King – which one did not do lightly – and not only about his political policies but about his personal life. In the darkness of his cell, we can understand him wondering: ***Was I right?*** John had heard rumors of miracles that healed bodies and teaching that moved hearts. But what if Herod’s power was greater than those words about turning the other cheek and going the extra mile; what if John’s enthusiasm had created an image of Jesus in his mind that was not really true? It’s one thing to believe; but now his life was at stake. And so he sends his friends to put the question to Jesus: ***“Are you the One, or do we look for another?”***

Why did Jesus not simply declare, “Yes, I am the promised One?” At the time, and even today, there were many who make that claim. Jesus did not want to be considered just one more of the crowd of Messiahs who hold out false expectations. If we think the Savior won’t call us to change our lives, or will arrange things for our convenience and advantage, then we clearly have not accepted Who He is, but are looking for another.

So rather than an open claim, Jesus reassures John by sending eyewitnesses. **“Go and tell John what you see and hear.”** He points to his preaching and his miracles, which are exactly what Isaiah had foretold the Messiah would be doing. With this assurance – not just rumors, but the testimony of witnesses – John finds hope; and with hope, the strength to accept his imprisonment and eventually even a martyr’s death. In an unexpected way, then, John fulfills his mission; for even his question, “Are You the One?”, leads others to discover in Jesus the Lamb of God, the Savior, their Promised Redeemer.

Mother Teresa found the surest path to know Jesus through those who shared His Cross. At the end of every Mass, Jesus sends us as those eyewitnesses: **“Go and tell what you see and hear”** – to experience here the presence and love of Jesus, and then share it, not for fame or glory, but for the love of God. That will not resolve every need of a broken world, but we will be continuing John’s mission to point out the Lamb of God. Later on, we read the Baptist’s final recorded words in John’s Gospel. Speaking of Jesus as the One Who is to Come, and himself merely as a messenger, John says: *“He must increase, and I must decrease.”* Mother Teresa lived by those words; and so can we.