

The Third Sunday of Advent

This is the testimony given by John when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, 'Who are you?' He confessed and did not deny it, but confessed, 'I am not the Messiah.' And they asked him, 'What then? Are you Elijah?' He said, 'I am not.' 'Are you the prophet?' He answered, 'No.' Then they said to him, 'Who are you? Let us have an answer for those who sent us.

Like last week's reading from St. Mark, today's Gospel presents John the Baptist. In this passage people are asking John who he might be. They ask him if he is the Christ, or Elijah, or the Prophet Who Is to Come. John responds that he is none of these. He is the one who is preparing the way for the Lord. The people who questioned John were priests and Levites sent by the Hebrew authorities in Jerusalem. They were not sincerely seeking the Messiah. But we are. We are looking for His presence in our lives. We are looking for Him to come a Second Time and bring justice and peace to the world. We are looking for his presence among us and within us right now. We are looking for Him to heal the sick and to heal us. At the same time, we know that His presence is real in the world and in our lives. 'Rejoice', this Sunday tells us. The Rose candle reminds us that this is a time of great expectations. Rejoice, Christmas is almost here. Rejoice, not so much that we have found Christ, but in that He has found us. Rejoice, that we do not have to wonder about Christ. We only have to question ourselves: Are we letting Him into our lives?

Every year people of faith protest against the secularization of Christmas. The celebration has been turned from its original meaning, the Birth of Jesus, to an explosion of plastic gifts and manufactured feelings. Many have spoken in the Churches about the need we have to reclaim Christmas. Well, I don't think we need to reclaim anything. In this Church we have always celebrated Christmas properly. What I do think that we need to do is be sure that we don't allow secular political correctness into our vocabulary. We are Christians. Be proud and say to people, "Merry Christmas". Our greetings should be a statement of our faith. This is the celebration of the greatest birth to ever take place, God becoming man in Jesus Christ.

Many people are seeking and hoping for something to fill their needs this Christmas. Children are looking for toys, adults are looking for gifts that express love. This is all good. But what is it that we really need? What is it that we are really seeking?

The late Pope John Paul II, answered that question in an address given in Rome at the Prayer Vigil during World Youth Day 2000. The address is meant for all of us. The statement is worth quoting:

"It is Jesus that you seek when you dream of happiness. He is waiting for you when nothing else ever satisfies you. He is the beauty to which you are so attracted. It is He who provokes you with that thirst for fullness that will not let you settle for compromise. It is He that urges you to shed the masks of a false life. It is He who reads in your hearts your most genuine choices, the choices that others try to stifle. It is Jesus who stirs up in you the desire to do something great with your lives, the will to follow an ideal, the refusal to allow yourselves to be grounded down by mediocrity, the courage to commit yourselves humbly and patiently to improving yourselves and society, making the world more human and more fraternal."

We can't be satisfied with just saying that Christmas is about Jesus. Our lives must be about Jesus. He gives us meaning, and purpose, and beauty. He fills our emptiness. Rejoice in the Lord. The world is quite different when we let Jesus into our lives. Our whole focus changes. We are less concerned with ourselves and more concerned with loving as He loved, sacrificially. We are no longer babies crying out for all our needs to be filled. No, when we let Jesus into our lives, we become mature adults, even if we are still only children or teens. Rejoice in the Lord. With Jesus in our lives, the crises we face become challenges, but not devastating events. A loved one becomes sick, or even dies. We become sick and receive the diagnosis that our condition is terminal. A marriage falls apart. A job is lost. A friend is lost. Whatever the current crises that confront us may be, we know that the final result will be union with God. Jesus is with us always, particularly in the worst of our times. Rejoice in the Lord.

It is the same for those whom we love. All of us, every single one of us, would risk or give up our lives for our children and teens, for our spouses, for each other, and even for those whom we do not know. When our loved ones hurt, we would gladly take the pain on ourselves if that could remove it from them. But, most often, we cannot do this. Still, we are convinced, convinced in faith, that Jesus can do what we cannot do. He can take their pain on Himself. He did on the cross. Rejoice in the Lord. Live or die. We are all the Lord's.

I have a close friend who is a committed Christian. He will often speak about the vast change in his life since he found Jesus. He is correct. He has become a kind man. He has become a generous man. But, the change in his life is not because he has found Jesus. The change came because he stopped hiding behind the impoverished values of the materialist world and came into the Light. He allowed Jesus to find Him. It is really the same for each of us. Rejoice in the Lord! Rejoice not so much that we have found Christ, but rejoice that He has found us, each of us.