

Sunday, December 15, 2019

Third Sunday of Advent

Meditation and Questions for Reflection or Group Discussion

Mass Readings:

1st Reading: Isaiah 35:1-6, 10

2nd Reading: James 5:7-10

Responsorial: Psalm 146:6-10

Gospel: Matthew 11:2-11

Advent, A Season of Joy in the Coming of the Messiah

Are you the one who is to come, or should we look for another? (Matthew 11:3)

What a strange question, especially from John the Baptist. Not only was John Jesus' kinsman, but he had baptized Jesus and seen the Spirit descend upon him. But now that he is in prison and awaiting execution, John seems uncertain. Was he wearied by suffering? Did he need reassurance that he had not labored in vain? Or had he heard rumors of plots to kill Jesus and couldn't conceive that God's Messiah would suffer death? We just don't know.

But perhaps John wasn't uncertain at all. Maybe it was all part of the plan. What if John was doing exactly what he had always done: helping people recognize the Messiah? Maybe his question wasn't for himself but for his disciples—to help them believe in Jesus.

John's time was short. Concerned for his followers, he wouldn't want them to fall away once he died. His mission had always been to lead people to Jesus, and he was determined to be faithful to that mission right up to the very end. So it makes sense that before he died, John would want his disciples to know for themselves that Jesus was the Messiah. It makes sense that meeting Jesus would persuade them far more than John's words.

John's question resonates in our hearts too. Is Jesus really who he says he is? Can we find joy in him no matter what? Of course, we already have faith in Jesus, but don't we all need more? So John sends us to Jesus, along with his disciples, so that we can hear and see him.

Today is Gaudete Sunday, a day to rejoice that the Messiah is near. So when you see Jesus on the cross in your church, when you hear him in his word and receive him in Communion, echo John's question: "Are you the one my heart is searching for?" Try to quiet your heart, and listen for his answer. Let him convince you of his love and his grace. And then rejoice with him.

"Lord, I believe you are the Son of God."

(Many thanks to *The Word Among Us* (www.wau.org) for allowing us to use meditations from their monthly devotional magazine. Used with permission.)

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Questions for Reflection or Discussion:

1. In the first reading, we hear these prophetic words about the coming of the Messiah: *Be strong, fear not! Here is your God; he comes with vindication; with divine recompense he comes to save you. Then will the eyes of the blind be opened, the ears of the deaf be cleared; then will the lame leap like a stag, then the tongue of the mute will sing.* The reading ends with these words: *Those whom the LORD has ransomed will return and enter Zion singing, crowned with everlasting joy; they will meet with joy and gladness, sorrow and mourning will flee.*
 - In what ways did the Lord Jesus fulfill the prophetic words about the coming of the Messiah?
 - Do you see yourself as one of those who the promised Messiah has strengthened and healed? In what ways?
 - The ending words tell how the Israelites will rejoice over the salvation *the LORD* has brought them. Why is that a cause for us to be *singing, crowned with everlasting joy* and filled with *joy and gladness*?
2. The responsorial psalm opens with these words: *The LORD God keeps faith forever, secures justice for the oppressed, gives food to the hungry. The LORD sets captives free. The LORD gives sight to the blind; the LORD raises up those who were bowed down. The LORD loves the just; the LORD protects strangers. The fatherless and the widow he sustains, but the way of the wicked he thwarts.*
 - How would you describe the similarities between the first reading and the responsorial psalm?
 - The psalm describes our Lord's actions on behalf of those in need? As Christ's disciple, are there any of those in need that the Lord is asking you to serve during and after Advent? What about this week?
3. The second reading begins as follows: *Be patient, brothers and sisters, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient with it until it receives the early and the late rains. You too must be patient.* It continues with these words: *Do not complain, brothers and sisters, about one another, that you may not be judged. Behold, the Judge is standing before the gates.*
 - When it comes to being patient, how would you rate yourself -- for example, do you tend to turn to the Lord for help, wisdom, and guidance when problems arise, or do you often just rush ahead yourself? What can you do to be more patient in responding to situations, and to be more open and sensitive to the Lord's leading?
 - St. James also tells us not to complain or be judgmental. How often do you fall into one of those categories during the day? What can you do to take "captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ" (2 Cor 10:5)?
4. The Gospel reading opens with these words: *When John the Baptist heard in prison of the works of the Christ, he sent his disciples to Jesus with this question, "Are you the one who is to come, or should we look for another?" Jesus said to them in reply, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind regain their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have the good news proclaimed to them. And blessed is the one who takes no offense at me."*
 - Why do you think Jesus answered John's disciples' question by saying that he is the one who has fulfilled all the messianic promises, including those described in the first reading and responsorial psalm?
 - If you were asked why you believe that Jesus is the Messiah sent by God to heal us and save us, and set us free from sin and death, how would you answer?
5. The meditation is a reflection on the Gospel reading and these words: *Are you the one who is to come, or should we look for another* (Matthew 11:3)? It closes with these words: "John's question resonates in our hearts too. Is Jesus really who he says he is? Can we find joy in him no matter what? Of course, we already have faith in Jesus, but don't we all need more? So John sends us to Jesus, along with his disciples, so that we can hear and see him. Today is Gaudete Sunday, a day to rejoice that the Messiah is near. So when you see Jesus on the cross in your church, when you hear him in his word and receive him in Communion, echo John's question: 'Are you the one my heart is searching for?' Try to quiet your heart, and listen for his answer. Let him convince you of his love and his grace. And then rejoice with him."
 - How would you answer the four questions posed in the closing words of the meditation?
 - How do you think Jesus would answer those questions?
 - What are some additional steps you can take in the remaining weeks of Advent that will allow Jesus to "convince you of his love and his grace," especially prior to and during Mass, and in prayer?

Take some time now to pray and thank the Lord for revealing himself to you as *the Messiah, the Son of the living God* (Matthew 16:16). Use the prayer below from the end of the meditation as a starting point.

"Lord, I believe you are the Son of God."

[The discussion questions were created by Maurice Blumberg, who is currently a member of the board of directors of the ChristLife Catholic Ministry for Evangelization (www.christlife.org), a member of the National Service Committee Council of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal (www.nsc-chariscenter.org), and a board member of The Love of Christ Foundation. Prior to this, Maurice was the founding executive director of the National Fellowship of Catholic Men, a chairman of the board of *The Word Among Us* (www.wau.org), and a director of partner relations for The Word Among Us Partners ministry.]