

### 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Advent (Gaudete Sunday)

Isaiah 35:1-6;10

James 5:7-10

Mt 11:2-11

Once again John the Baptist is the focus of today's gospel reading. In last week's reading John identified Jesus as one who would baptise with the Holy Spirit and with fire, gathering the righteous to Himself and destroying the unrighteous. John was imprisoned before Jesus began His ministry and what he was hearing about Jesus was His telling stories of mercy and forgiveness.

It isn't surprising that John asked his followers to check with Jesus whether He was the one or whether they should wait for someone else. John wanted to make sure he hadn't got it wrong. The question was simple but as usual Jesus did not give a simple answer. Jesus told John's disciples to report what they had seen. What they *had* seen was what Isaiah said the new age of God's reign would be like. New life would be breathed into dry and meaningless lives; sight would be given to the spiritually blind and the truth of God would be grasped by the spiritually lame.

John sent his disciples to ask Jesus who He is. Jesus then asks His listeners who they think John is. John wasn't some over bloated strutting peacock claiming power and status based on empty piety. He is the greatest of the prophets, the new Elijah who would announce the coming of God's Messiah. "Even so," Jesus said, "he is less than those who embrace the truth of God's Kingdom and try to live by its standards."

John had set the stage for the working out of God's plan of salvation but he didn't quite grasp it. He was both right and wrong. He knew that God was working through Jesus but it wasn't turning out quite as he expected it to. This is a common experience of many disciples. We are sure that God answers our prayers, but less sure when events don't turn out as we wanted them to. Many Catholics claim that God reveals His will through the Church but *actually* believe that God's will is achieved through a majority vote at a Church meeting or through secular Government legislation. No wonder Jesus said, "Happy are those who do not lose faith in me."

Jesus' teachings and actions have to be understood at different levels. He heals the physically blind as a visible sign of the healing of the spiritually blind. He feeds the 5000 with bread and fish as a sign that points to the feeding of His disciples with Himself through His Real Presence in the consecrated bread and wine of the Mass. John's disciples were told to go back to John and tell him to read the signs and make the connections.

God is a God of surprises. We cannot put Him in a box. Only those with the eyes of faith will see, and only those with the ears of conviction will hear. This is why the faithful must ensure that we understand how and why the Church has come to understand what God has revealed of Himself and teaches what it has come to understand God's will to be.

Scripture tells us that God created human beings in His own image but humans have been returning the compliment ever since. Advent is the time for us to stop creating the god we

would like Him to be, assuming we believe in a god other than ourselves. The Church believes that the God who has created us is the one who came to share our fragile humanity and restore our relationship to Himself. Jesus is the “Word who became flesh and dwelt among us.”

As the epistle to James and the message of Advent urges us, we must exercise patience and not lose heart as we proclaim the gospel of the resurrection while we wait with open hearts for the return of Jesus at a time that we know not.

*Msgr Harry Entwistle*

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