

3rd Sunday of Advent, 11 December 2022

Scriptures: Isaiah 35:1-6a,10; James 5:7-10; Matthew 11:2-11

Homily: Fr. Ken

On this third Sunday of Advent each year, John the Baptist features in the Gospel. Every third year, it is Matthew's Gospel where we encounter John, this time in prison, near the end of his adult life. He has heard different accounts about what Jesus has said and done.

John knows his own life is likely to end very soon at the command of Herod. So he wants to make sure he has not been mistaken in identifying Jesus as the awaited one, the Messiah.

John sends his disciples to ask Jesus, "Are you the one who is to come, or must we wait for someone else?"

Jesus' answer is that to see the signs of God requires noticing what is happening all around.

Jesus instructs John's disciples to tell John what they have seen and heard, the signs of the messianic age: "the blind see...the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised to life. And the Good News is proclaimed to the poor".

There is one more statement that Jesus makes about the signs he has produced to show the kingdom of God is at hand. He says, "Happy is the one who does not lose faith in me". Does this refer to John? Is John wavering now that his life is in danger? Perhaps it is more likely that Jesus is describing John as the one who is most likely to see the signs of the Messiah's presence.

Of course, those who go back to John will need to do more than simply tell him what they have seen and heard. They must

describe, with conviction, the signs they have seen indicating that the Kingdom of God truly is at hand.

So, it might be asked, why did people not see these signs? Isaiah the prophet spoke of people who "hear and hear again, but do not understand; who see and see again, but do not perceive". John clearly does not fall into that category. John is the one of whom Jesus says: "Happy is the one who does not lose faith in me".

The question for us arises: How well do we today recognize the signs that the Kingdom of God is truly among us?

The answer must be the same as it was in Jesus' time: "The blind see...the deaf hear...the Good News is proclaimed to the poor". Few of us have the power to do these things literally, but we do have power to do so in a spiritual sense. So many people are voiceless in today's world, but we can help their voices be heard; our own lives proclaim the Good News when we are concerned for others' well-being. We may not physically heal people who have leprosy, but we can ensure that no one in our presence is made to feel inadequate or excluded. John the Baptist was a great prophetic figure, witnessing to the one whom God had sent. In baptism, we are incorporated into Jesus' prophetic role. We live that way when our entire lives are proclamations of the Good News of Jesus Christ.

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