**3rd Sunday of Advent – Cycle B**

December 10/11, 2011

Is 61: 1-2a, 10-11; 1 Thes 5: 16-24; John 1: 6-8, 19-28

Imagine this, if you would: As you leave the church today, you meet a man outside on the sidewalk. He is disheveled, a bit dirty, scrubby, and has an odor about him. He is out there loudly shouting and pointing at another man who is in this congregation right now and leaving with us. He says, “Look! There is the Lord! He is in your midst! I am not worthy to untie his shoes!”

What would you think? What would you do? Would you scurry away and let someone else deal with him? Would you try to shut him up, or maybe escort him off to the side to calm him down? Would you think the guy was crazy? What would you say to the man to whom he pointed? We would have a hard time seeing in these men either a prophet or the presence of the Lord Jesus wouldn’t we.

We who are rich find it so hard at times to recognize God or one of his prophets. Why is it always, it seems, the poor who recognize him first?

As John the Baptist reminds us, we are not worthy to unfasten the strap of the sandals of the poor man for he is the Lord in a distressing disguise, as Mother Teresa so often said. The same is true for the man on death row or the unwed pregnant woman and her unborn child or those in our jails or those suffering from mental illness or addictions, or the immigrant and undocumented alien. They are the Lord in a very distressing disguise. Until we can come to recognize the coming of the Lord in these people, we will fall into a rather shallow personal piety that is removed from real charity.

Just as Christ came into our world over 2000 years ago, and will come again in all his glory sometime in the future, so too he comes into the world of today in the lives of the poor, the condemned, the in distressed, and the immigrant. We are not worthy to stoop and unfasten the sandal straps of these people, yet we are called to do God’s work by serving them.

My friends, the Lord is in our midst! He is here because we have here in our parish the poor and the brokenhearted. And God is with them and in them, and through them He comes into our lives each and every day.

As God comes into our lives by their presence to us, so we too must come into their lives by our presence to them for we are the hands and feet, the heart and the voice of Jesus.

We are to be sources of joy, salvation, freedom and justice for all who are in need, especially the hungry and the poor.

We are to be the Church, the People of God, and the Body of Christ in today’s world.

My friends, we are called to release our spirits, to hear the Gospel, to reverence the good in each other. We are called to stop doing evil by failing to do good.

We are called to rejoice with the poor, be sources of joy for the brokenhearted, to announce a day of salvation and release to prisoners, to act justly in all we do.

We are called to protect human life from conception to natural death. We are called to have mercy, not vengeance, on the condemned on death row. We are called to assist each and every mother in a distressing pregnancy so that she might welcome and love the child within her. We must defend marriage as the union of one man with one woman.

This is the work of Jesus. This is our work. This is how Jesus comes into our world today. We are to enter their lives just like he enters our lives

Poverty and abortion and capital punishment and efforts to redefine marriage as something other than what it is are great evils in our world today. We must act to eliminate them! Failure to do so has intolerable consequences for all of us.

Those of us with a secure income are going to be held accountable for the poor in our midst. Those of us who eat well three times a day we will be held responsible for the suffering of those who cannot feed themselves. Those of us who value the sanctity of the unborn and the sick and the aged and the handicapped will be held responsible for their lives. All of us who are married will be held responsible for protecting marriage as a union of one man and one woman in this state. We must be compassionate with the immigrant. This may offend our sense of justice but it does not offend God’s justice. We must act - act now - do something constructive in these matters.

We are witnesses and we must testify that God, Emmanuel, is with us! As St. Paul said in our second reading today: ***Do not quench your Spirit*!**

Let us remember what the prophet Isaiah said, ***The spirit of the Lord is upon you, because the Lord has anointed you to bring glad tidings to the poor, to heal the brokenhearted, to announce a year of favor from our God****.*

And finally, let us recall the words of St. John, ***You are a voice crying out in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way of the Lord.’***

May God help us in doing his work.