Third Sunday of Advent

December 11/12, 2010

Year A

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

“Are you the one who is to come, or should we look for another?” (Mt. 11:3) How often have we asked that question?

And when we do, do we ask with our hearts closed in doubt and discouragement ----- or in hopeful expectation?

Why ***did*** John send his disciples to Jesus with this question? John had been thrown into prison. He probably expected to be put to death soon. Did he have some doubt about who Jesus was? Was his faith wavering at the end of his life?

Or did he send them to Jesus to strengthen their faith?

I think John was being John. John was doing his job, and doing it well. The purpose of John’s whole life was to point out the Messiah and to prepare the people for his coming. John lived to lead others to Christ.

John knew his job was nearly over. He was in prison for standing up to the king and because of a foolish promise the king had made to a young woman. John’s public ministry was nearing its end. He had always said, “I must decrease and he must increase.” John had declared earlier, “Look! There is the Lamb of God!” John knew who Jesus was. John knew who John was: only a prophet, the one to lead others to Jesus. He was like the Blessed Virgin Mary in that way. Just as Moses was the bridge between the slavery in Egypt and the freedom of the Promised Land, so John was the bridge between the Old Testament and the New, between the Old Law of sin and death and the New Law of love and life.

But he sent his disciples to ask the question because once again he pointed the people away from him and toward Jesus. He wanted his disciples to hear from Jesus himself that he, Jesus, was the fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy, which we heard today in our first reading.

“Are you the One who is to come, or should we look for another?”

Who do you go out to see? Who do you follow? What do you expect when you go searching for God? One who speaks with authority, or one who bends to public opinion, like a reed swaying in the wind?

So many are searching; so many are listening to other voices than that of Christ and his Church. When you come to Mass what do you expect to see, to hear? What will you find?

John was the greatest of all the Old Testament prophets, even Moses, but anyone, Jesus tells us, who has been baptized into Christ, drawn up into the life of Jesus, is far greater than even John the Baptist.

Imagine that! What dignity we have, my friends. What marvelous work we can do by virtue of our baptism! What is that work that need s to be done….?

Jesus makes it pretty clear what work we will need to do when we come to him with the question, “Are you the Savior who we are to expect?” “Yes,” he says, “I am he.” How do we know? The poor are fed, the blind see, the lame walk, the deaf hear, and the dead are raised to new life. Jesus claims his authority by caring for others. These are the great works accomplished by him, and the great works we too are to do in his name. These are the great things done by those who receive the Gospel. These are the “splendor of God” that Isaiah mentions in today’s first reading.

Jesus clearly says that his authority comes from the authority of service to others.

So many are searching, listening to many voices in our world, voices that only confuse and mislead. Some are turning to Buddha. Some are listening to old pagan religions.

Only Jesus Christ speaks the whole truth.

Do we send others to Jesus with the question, “Are you the One?”

Do we send we point out Jesus to others?

Do we get out of the way so others may really see Jesus in us and among us?

Can we let Jesus do the talking? Not making our voice heard, but letting Jesus’ voice call us to faith?

If you go to Jesus this Advent with the question, “Are you the One?” you will find yourself with the poor and the sick. You will be called to serve the Church. You cannot escape this. Just as John points to Jesus, Jesus points us to the poor and the sick and the marginalized because they are the way back to our Father, our ticket to heaven.

Those who hear the Gospel will be called to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, teach the ignorant, bury the dead and heal the sick. Because if you ask Jesus, “Who are you?” He will answer by showing you these, the least and most needy of our world.

Yes, if we go out to Jesus, what do we expect to see and hear? Someone fun and entertaining or someone who challenges us, maybe even demands something of us?

Remember what Jesus said at the end of his answer to John’s disciples? “Blessed is the one who takes no offense in me.” Let us not be offended if Jesus challenges us and pulls us out of our comfort zones. Let us not be offended by those who are less fortunate that us. Let us not be offended if Advent for us this year demands change in how we live, in our priorities.

Let us prepare well this Advent. Like John the Baptist, let us always direct our children, our families, our communities to Jesus and his Church. Let us assume the great authority which is ours in seeing Jesus himself in the suffering and the poor and by serving them in his name.

When Jesus comes, there will be peace.

When Jesus comes, there will be healing.

When Jesus comes, there will once again be one flock and one shepherd.

Come, Lord Jesus!