

121309 Third Sunday in Advent John the Baptist

Praise be Jesus Christ. Now and forever.

One of my joys of recent years is meeting some holy people – people who have inspired me... people whose faith and Gospel-activation has been so magnetic – that my faith is lifted to new heights, at times.

One of these people is a powerful woman of the Lord... This woman is named Lucille -- I talked about her last month. And coincidentally, my wife and I had breakfast with her during our recent travels. One of the things that Lucille used to talk to me about was John the Baptist. She would say things about how powerful and profound the plan of God was and is... and how special that God's plans included John the Baptist. Lucille used to say to me... "Thomas – do you know how awesome it would be to be like John the Baptist? To be one whose whole purpose in life is to proclaim Christ – to prepare people for his coming in their lives? "

You can't help be around someone like Lucille that you don't come to a heightened feeling of how profound St. John the Baptist was... how important his role was in redemption history.

In Matthew's Gospel – we hear the Baptist preaching – "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." The message is twofold. There is a call to *repentance*, a word that means "to turn around, to change one's mind and heart." To repent is not just a matter of expressing sorrow for something. It is to have an entirely new orientation. The second part of John's message is his proclamation that the kingdom of heaven is near. Repentance, then, is a response to this nearness.

So John the Baptist is a good saint to meditate on during Advent -- to focus on as we consider how the year of faith we're completing has gone... and whether or not we are making plans for a real and new coming of Christ in our lives. And since repentance is a proper response to the nearness of the Babe of Bethlehem -- we can prepare ourselves for a meaningful repentance and Confession at our parish penance service this Wednesday.

Going back to John the Baptist -- it isn't him or his birthday we are celebrating, but in the Liturgy of the Hours that priests and deacons say, there is an extract from a sermon by St. Augustine. In that sermon – St. Augustine said the Church observes the birth of John as a hallowed event. We have no celebration for the birth of other fathers in the Church. Augustine says that it is significant that the only two men's birthdays we celebrate are John and Jesus.

Now if Jesus thought so highly of John the Baptist -- if He refers to him when he said no greater man born of flesh has come into the world, I think we would do well to meditate on some things during the remainder of this Advent. John the Baptist was different. He was profound and a challenger. That tells us we are not just called to be nice people to those who believe what we believe. We are called to be like the Baptist. The Baptist told people to get ready for the coming of a new Messiah. He told people to stop living the lives they were living. Faith in Jesus needs to be real and vibrant.

Archbishop Charles Chaput says, "Faith should impregnate everything we do. God doesn't need 'nice' Christians."

God doesn't need anonymous Christians, Christians who blend in... Christians who don't make waves. We are here to rock the boat." Chaput says we are all appointed as mentors to the next generation of believers. Each day, we bear the mantle of responsibility for the faith practice of our children and grandchildren... our neighbor... those in jail... those in hospice... those in the hospital or nursing homes.

Or, consider the words of C. S. Lewis – "Christianity, if false is of no importance. And if true, it is of infinite importance. The one thing it cannot be is moderately important."

And so, if Jesus is who we believe in... and if Jesus is our leader... and if Jesus liked... really liked and appreciated what John the Baptist did --- then that's the model for us to strive for. So -- while it's nice to serve coffee and donuts to people after Sunday Masses -- that's like loving those who love you.... it's good but it's not what our primary call is.

I need to try harder to become a Tom the Baptist. And I submit you are called to become Frank the Baptist... and Joan the Baptist... and Rita the Baptist... we need to become so filled with the Spirit that we help try to lead non-believers... and sinners... and fallen away people back to the faith.

Think about the theme of the first reading... we were exhorted to shout and sing and exult from the heart. Or think about the words of the Responsorial... Cry out with joy and gladness... Is this how you feel about your faith in Christ and in the Church and the Sacraments?

If some sitting here believe that we Catholics aren't meant to be really excited about our faith, those who think like that have bought a bill of goods. They've been formed by the world... and they've lost the fire started by the graces of Baptism and Confirmation.

Now how can we apply this challenge to our lives? I go back to basics... basics that some people mistakenly think were thrown out by because they were old fashioned. Do you say grace before meals... in your home and in public? Do you have a prominent picture of Christ in your home, or any religious pictures at all? Do you pray the rosary? Do you come to Adoration? Are you trying to help the poor or ill or dying? Do you watch EWTN Catholic television? Do you read the lives of the saints? Do you really want a vibrant faith life? Or is it about being comfortable with what you are doing... what you have been doing?

We have raised a couple generations of people who believe it's all about them... and what John the Baptist told people who focused on self was to repent and be born again -- be ready -- at the ready for coming of the Messiah.

I hope you won't be too challenged by this message today. Well, on second thought... if you are made uncomfortable by these words... John the Baptist came and gave comfort to the afflicted and he afflicted the comfortable. Please join me in the line for a fresh start in life... join me in the line for the Sacrament of Reconciliation this Wednesday afternoon.

Tell Jesus that you've been thinking that you'd like to become a Baptist... well... not a Protestant Baptist... but another John the Baptist. You'll make the infant Jesus and His Mother smile in the manger this Christmas. Blessings.

Reading 1

Zep 3:14-18a

Shout for joy, O daughter Zion!
Sing joyfully, O Israel!
Be glad and exult with all your heart,
O daughter Jerusalem!
The LORD has removed the judgment against you
he has turned away your enemies;
the King of Israel, the LORD, is in your midst,
you have no further misfortune to fear.
On that day, it shall be said to Jerusalem:
Fear not, O Zion, be not discouraged!
The LORD, your God, is in your midst,
a mighty savior;
he will rejoice over you with gladness,
and renew you in his love,
he will sing joyfully because of you,
as one sings at festivals.

Responsorial Psalm

Is 12:2-3, 4, 5-6

R. (6) Cry out with joy and gladness: for among you is the great and Holy One of Israel.

God indeed is my savior;

I am confident and unafeard.

My strength and my courage is the LORD,
and he has been my savior.

With joy you will draw water
at the fountain of salvation.

R. Cry out with joy and gladness: for among you is the great and Holy One of Israel.

Give thanks to the LORD, acclaim his name;
among the nations make known his deeds,
proclaim how exalted is his name.

R. Cry out with joy and gladness: for among you is the great and Holy One of Israel.

Sing praise to the LORD for his glorious achievement;
let this be known throughout all the earth.

Shout with exultation, O city of Zion,
for great in your midst
is the Holy One of Israel!

R. Cry out with joy and gladness: for among you is the great and Holy One of Israel.

Reading II

Phil 4:4-7

Brothers and sisters:

Rejoice in the Lord always.

I shall say it again: rejoice!

Your kindness should be known to all.

The Lord is near.

Have no anxiety at all, but in everything,

by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving,

make your requests known to God.

Then the peace of God that surpasses all understanding

will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

Gospel

Lk 3:10-18

The crowds asked John the Baptist,

“What should we do?”

He said to them in reply,

“Whoever has two cloaks

should share with the person who has none.

And whoever has food should do likewise.”

Even tax collectors came to be baptized and they said to him,

“Teacher, what should we do?”

He answered them,

“Stop collecting more than what is prescribed.”

Soldiers also asked him,

“And what is it that we should do?”

He told them,

“Do not practice extortion,

do not falsely accuse anyone,

and be satisfied with your wages.”

Now the people were filled with expectation,

and all were asking in their hearts

whether John might be the Christ.

John answered them all, saying,

“I am baptizing you with water,

but one mightier than I is coming.

I am not worthy to loosen the thongs of his sandals.

He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

His winnowing fan is in his hand to clear his threshing floor

and to gather the wheat into his barn,

but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.”

Exhorting them in many other ways,

he preached good news to the people.