

Homily for 12-10-17 – 2nd Week of Advent - A Voice Cries Out in the Desert
By
Deacon Mick Irving

At an Italian wedding ceremony in a big Italian church, the pastor asked if anyone had anything to say concerning the union of the bride and groom. It was their time to stand up and talk, or forever hold their peace. The moment of the utter silence was broken by a beautiful, young woman carrying a child. She started walking slowly down the aisle.

Everything quickly turned to chaos. The bride slapped the groom! The groom's mother fainted. The groomsmen started giving each other looks and wondering how best to help save the situation. The pastor asked the woman, "Why have you come forward?" The woman, frowning and pointing toward the bride and groom said, "We can't hear in the back!"

Well, in this farcical scenario, the young woman felt she was too far removed from the celebration she had long anticipated thus she came forward so that she and others could experience it more fully. In our Gospel today, the people of Judah and Jerusalem had long been yearning for their Savior, and when they learned that there was "a voice crying out in the desert", they recognized that the Christ may be near. Hence, many came forward, full of high expectations, to hear John the Baptist and to participate more fully in the preparations for the coming of their Savior.

John the Baptist must have been a sight to see, wearing a coat of camel's hair and a leather belt and living off of locusts (grasshoppers) and wild honey. You know, as a young man, which was just a few years ago, I wondered how John could have obtained wild honey without getting stung.

Our Blessed Lord said of John in the Gospel of Matthew: "Truly, I say to you, among those born of woman there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist". As a young man, I

thought that Christ was referring to John's disciplined ruggedness as a man—a man not swayed by earthly comforts nor diverted from his mission or the path of discipline, a man even impervious to the sting of bees. I always perceived him to be the strongest, most leathery, most rugged of men. For those of you who have watched “City Slickers”, I envisioned him to be like the weathered cowboy – Curly, but perhaps a bit holier!

As I have grown in age, and maybe a little bit of wisdom, I have come to realize that my thinking may NOT have been entirely accurate! Maybe Christ was referring to John's role in Salvation History up to that point.

When Christ said that no one was greater than John the Baptist, He was essentially saying that John was the greatest prophet and that he was, in fact, Elijah who is to come. So, when reading Scripture, the lesson I learned was that , in order to “hear” more fully the message of Scripture, it is best to also read what is written before and after the passage.

Today, our Gospel writer states:

***Behold, I am sending my messenger ahead of you;
he will prepare your way.
A voice of one crying out in the desert:
'Prepare the way of the Lord,
make straight his paths.'***

Just as the young, mother at the wedding wanted to get closer to hear, so did the people of Judah.

***People of the whole Judean countryside
and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem
were going out to him and were being
baptized by him in the Jordan River
as they acknowledged their sins.***

The people of Judah were going out to hear John's message, which was a message of baptism and repentance leading to the forgiveness of sins. John was preparing the people for the

coming of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. It is interesting to consider that the Gospel writer wrote this account regarding John the Baptist well after the coming of the Messiah and after Christ's passion, death and resurrection. So, for whom is he is writing it? For us!

What is the message from Scripture we should hear today, on this Second Sunday of Advent? It is that we, too, need to prepare for Jesus's coming, to "Prepare the way for the Lord" and "make straight His paths." We are certainly not preparing for His FIRST coming, it is already past. We are actually preparing for His second coming. The Scripture passages and the celebration of Christmas remind us of that.

John's words are extremely important for us today:

***One mightier than I is coming after me.
I am not worthy to stoop and loosen the
thongs of his sandals.***

Returning to the message about John being the greatest—as we read further, we note that Christ goes on to say: "...yet, the least born into the Kingdom of God is greater than he." We are those born into the Kingdom of God and it is our duty, our responsibility, to prepare for the Lord's Second Coming when Jesus will hand over the Kingdom to the Father. The Kingdom of God will not reach fulfillment until the Second Coming of Christ.

The expression "Kingdom of God" is used 32 times in the Scripture and is synonymous with the terms "Kingdom of Heaven". The Kingdom of God is the Messianic Kingdom, present in the person of Jesus Christ, and it remains in our midst in the Eucharist. It is essentially the Body of Christ—it is Christ's Church. So, the least born into the Church through water and the Holy Spirit are born into the Kingdom of God.

Today we have a number of catechumens and candidates who, having completed the period of inquiry, are participating in the Rite of Acceptance. Through this Rite they have been

marked with the Cross of Christ. They have become disciples and members of the household of faith.

As the Ignatius Catholic Commentary on the Scripture states:

John is the greatest Old Testament prophet. In the New Covenant, however, even the least New Testament saint outshines the most illustrious saints of old. These prophets looked ahead to the New Covenant but did not share fully in its blessings. Jesus thus contrasts the Old and New Covenants.

We are those born into the Kingdom of God through baptism of water and the Holy Spirit. We are now anticipating Christ's Second Coming. We are the ones called to discipline ourselves, to proclaim the Word of the Lord to the world, and we are the ones who, like the five wise virgins, will be prepared for the bridegroom's arrival.

In the Gospel of John there is a passage about John the Baptist's mission:

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came for testimony, to bear witness to the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to bear witness to the light.

That passage can be reworded to apply directly to us who have been born into the Kingdom of God:

There are men and women who have been sent from God whose names are James, and Sally, and Patricia, and Robert, and Sarah, and David. They came for testimony, to bear witness to the light, that all might believe in Him. They were not the Light, but came to bear witness to the Light.

We are the heralds of Jesus's Second Coming, and we must fulfill our duty to our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.