

Reflection for the 3rd Sunday of Advent

The crowds asked John the Baptist, "What should we do?" Luke 3:10

I wonder how often a Sunday Gospel Reading starts with a question? I will have to admit I would not be able to answer this question. I did google the question about how often a Sunday Gospel Reading starts with a question and all I got was a good number of articles explaining the cycle of Readings at Mass. I wonder how often that happens to us, we go looking for one thing and get something else. The answer we receive many times in our lives might not be what we are looking for, but it might be what we need. In this case, I found myself just moving on to the rest of the Gospel reading for this Sunday. Maybe this was a question that did not need an answer, and there were more important things in the Gospel reading to ponder. In this reading we hear of St. John the Baptist instructing the crowds, who had come to him for baptism of how they should live their lives. They came for baptism, and they are instructed in how to live their daily life. He tells them that if they have two tunics, they should share them with the person who has none. In the time of Jesus, a tunic was a piece of clothing that a person wore next to their skin. Tunics had arm-length sleeves and extended down to the knees or even lower to the ankles and feet. John the Baptist goes on in the Gospel and points out that those who have food should share it with those who do not. He is pointing out to them, their responsibility to each other.

What the last of the prophets is pointing out is that the baptism that he has provided for the repentance from sin, is meant to have an impact on their lives. In this Gospel Reading this Sunday we then hear of the people who were baptized asking specific questions of how they should conduct their lives. They are looking for more than general information, they are looking for specific information that would impact their own personal lives. He answered questions from tax collectors and soldiers about how they should conduct themselves. John the Baptist did not ask people to leave their occupations but rather to live their lives in accord with what it means to be a follower of God. What John the Baptist is pointing out is that to prepare for the coming of the Messiah we need to change and so does the whole world. This message of John the Baptist continues past his ministry and is found throughout the writings of the New Testament and is part of the overall message of the Advent Season.

Throughout the history of the Catholic, Christian, Faith, there has been the understanding that embracing Jesus Christ, becoming a follower of His, we are embracing a whole new way of life. We set aside our former way of life and through the baptismal waters, we become a new creation. Hence it makes perfect sense that the people that embrace the message of St. John the Baptist, and are now awaiting the coming of the Messiah, would then ask, *"what should we do?"* They have embarked on a new way of life, that leads to eternal salvation. What are they to do with their lives in the here and now, as they await the coming of the Messiah? It is a great question that St. John the Baptist answers by informing the people to help one another and to give to those who are in need. But the people are looking for more, be it tax collectors, soldiers, and others. They are wondering if they should continue their daily lives as they await the Messiah, or should they stop what they are doing and just wait for the coming of the savior of the world? St. John the Baptist answers their question by informing them to go about their daily lives, but how they conduct themselves must be affected by their transformed relationship with God. The newly baptized that we hear about in our Gospel Reading this Sunday are sorting out their relationship with God and the world.

The people who heard the last of the prophets, two thousand years ago were changed by the words of St. John the Baptist, and their relationship with God was transformed. So here we are two thousand years later, and we are hearing the same words from the last of the prophets, the bridge between the Old and the New Testament. How are we reacting? Are we wondering what we should be doing differently in our lives? With two thousand years of faith, the teachings of the Church the example of the Saints, should we be

wondering? These are all good questions, and this Advent Season can provide us the time and opportunity to find the answers to these questions. Ultimately these questions can be summed up into the same question that the crowds asked St. John the Baptist, “*what should we do?*”

In closing the crowds that gathered around St. John the Baptist, two thousand years ago had been transformed and were trying to adapt to their new way of life. We to have been transformed through the Sacraments of our Faith, and every day we need to navigate in this world as a follower of Christ. So just like the crowds who turned to St. John the Baptist looking for guidance, may we always turn to our Lord and Savior for guidance and ask Him daily, dear Lord please guide me down the right path, that always leads to you.