

Third Thursday of Advent, December 16 Is 54:1-10; Lk 7:24-30

Dear Holy Name Family,

Last Thursday, we read a similar passage from St. Matthew's Gospel where Jesus strongly teaches the importance of John the Baptist as a key player in salvation history- the forerunner of the Messiah. Today, we read the version in the Gospel of Luke. Both record that "among those born of women, no one is greater..." even states John is "more than a prophet." This preaching further divides the religious leaders and people about believing that the time of prophecy has come to an end. Jesus' bold claim prompts us to see John's preaching and humble life as the return of Elijah regarding the Messiah is near. John the Baptist is the voice for the Word who is to come.

For a brief time both John and Jesus were among the people. What a moment to experience! Would we have been the tax collectors who believed and were baptized, or like the Pharisee and scholars of the law who refused the invitation? We cannot accept Jesus as the Messiah of God without embracing John the Baptist as the end of the line of great prophets. The final act now begins to alert us to recognize the presence of salvation in the form of a human person- Jesus. If we do not accept John's words and Jesus' definitive Messianic mission then neither are we accepting God's palm in our lives. The Advent Scriptures continue to send us strong messages about coming to hope and belief, which will transform the world and give us real freedom.

The freedom of Christ Jesus was a lost gift and the prophets spoke of the "days are coming" when the final transformation will take place. We sin, but God saves. Today in the final section of Isaiah, he paints images of the new Zion, the restored people and holy city. "Raise a glad cry...break forth in jubilant song..." salvation is like the recommitment of a broken and barren marriage relationship. like the history of God and this people Israel. Sterility, in those days, was seen as a punishment, shame, loss of dignity and a sign of sin. But God promises, "With great tenderness I will take you back." God saw the infidelity of the people, and for a moment "hid my face", but ultimately God tells them (in Isaiah's words) "my love shall never leave you." WE can count on the promise in both a physical way and spiritual way in committing ourselves to Jesus the Christ in our Baptism and beyond. John prepares, Jesus seals us as the His own people formed in baptism in the "Holy Spirit and fire."

Advent brings us to a choice like all the urgings of the Spirit in salvation history. It is our turn to translate our belief into hope for our brothers and sisters who struggle with basic needs, who live with depression (especially among the youth) who are along, who "have everything" but love.

Tomorrow begins the final week before Christmas or the Christmas Novena. Each day with Christmas Eve the little verse before the Gospel present a title or role of the Messiah and begins with an exclamation of "O", the first is "O Wisdom." These date back to the 8th and 9th century. You may know the hymn Of Come, O come, Emmanuel, which based on these titles! These beautiful images help us to keep time first in our lives and as he comes in history, mystery, and future glory.

May your advent preparations, penances and prayers open your hearts to greater compassion and hope.

Fr. Joesph P. Tito