Third Sunday of Advent (C)

Gospel text (*Lk* 3:10-18): The people asked John, “What then should we do?” He said to them in reply, “Whoever has two tunics 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 Messiah. 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.

“One mightier than I is coming”

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Today in the middle of Advent, the Word of God presents to us the Holy Precursor of Jesus Christ: Saint John the Baptist. God the Father prepared the coming, that is, the Advent, of his Son in our flesh, born of the Virgin Mary, in many ways and in many forms, as the beginning of the Letter to the Hebrews says (1:1). The patriarchs, the prophets and the kings prepared the coming of Jesus.

Let us look at his two genealogies in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. He is the son of Abraham and David. Moses, Isaiah and Jeremiah announced his Advent and described the characteristics of his mystery. But St. John the Baptist, as the liturgy says (Preface of his feast), was able to point him out with his finger, and it was his task - mysteriously! - to Baptize the Lord. He was the last witness before the coming. And he was so with his life, with his death and with his word. His birth is also announced, like that of Jesus, and is prepared, according to the Gospel of Luke (chapters 1 and 2). And his death as a martyr, victim of the weakness of a king and the hatred of a wicked woman, also prepares that of Jesus. For this reason, he received the extraordinary praise of Jesus himself that we read in the Gospels of Matthew and

Luke (cf. Mt 11:11; Lk 7:28): “Among those born of women there has been none greater than John the Baptist.” In the face of this, which he could not ignore, he is a model of humility: “I am not worthy to loosen the thongs of his sandals” (Lk 3:16), he tells us today. And, according to St. John (3:30): “He must increase; I must decrease.”

Let us hear his word today, which exhorts us to share what we have and to respect justice and the dignity of all. Let us thus prepare ourselves to receive the One who comes now to save us, and will come again to "judge the living and the dead".

Thoughts on Today's Gospel

- “We should take our lesson from John the Baptist. He declares he is not what they think. He humbled himself. He saw where his salvation lay. He understood that he was a lamp, and his fear was that it might be blown out by the wind of pride.” (St Augustine)

- “In these days, let us pray. But do not forget: let us pray, asking for the joy of Christmas. Let us give thanks to God for the good things that he has given us, above all the faith. This is a wonderful grace.” (Francis)

- “John the Baptist, who goes ‘before [the Lord] in the spirit and power of Elijah,’ (Lk 1:17) proclaims Christ as the one who ‘will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire’ (Lk 3:16). Jesus will say of the Spirit: ‘I came to cast fire upon the earth; and would that it were already kindled!’ (Lk 12:49) (...).” (Catechism Of The Catholic Church, Nº 696)