

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, well into Advent, God's word introduces us to Jesus Christ's precursor: Saint John the Baptist. God the Father is preparing the arrival, that is, the Advent, of His Son, born of the Virgin Mary, in many different ways, as the beginning of the Letter to the Hebrews (1.1), says: Patriarchs, Prophets and Kings prepared Jesus' arrival.

We see both genealogies, in Matthew's and Luke's Gospels. Jesus Christ son of Abraham, son of David. Moses, Isaiah and Jeremiah announced His Advent and described the features of His Ministry. But Saint John the Baptist, as can be seen in his liturgy (Preface of his feast day), would be the one to point him out to the world, and the privilege of Baptizing our Lord went —mysteriously! — to him. His was to be the very last testimony before Jesus' arrival. And he gave it with his life, with his death and with his word. His birth was also announced, like that of Jesus, and was prepared, as seen in Luke's Gospel (chapters 1 and 2). And his death, as a martyr, victim of a king's weakness and of a wicked woman's hatred, also prepared the way for that of Jesus. This is why, he receives the most extraordinary praise from Jesus himself, which can be read in Matthew's and Luke's Gospels (cf. Mt 11:11; Lk 7:28): “Amen, I say to you, among those born of women there has been none greater than John the Baptist”. John, who would have known of all this praise, is however an example of humility: he tells us today, “I am not worthy to loosen the thongs of his sandals”. (Lk 3:16). And, according to Saint John (3:30): “He must increase; I must decrease.”.

Let us listen today to his word, exhorting us to share what we have and to respect the justice and dignity everybody deserves. Thus, we shall be preparing ourselves to receive He who is coming to save us, and will come again to «judge the living and the dead».

Thoughts on Today's Gospel

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“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)

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“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)

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“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, N° 696)