Thursday of the Third Week of Advent

Gospel text (*Lk* 7:24-30): When the messengers of John had left, Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John. “What did you go out to the desert to see—a reed swayed by the wind? Then what did you go out to see? Someone dressed in fine garments? Those who dress luxuriously and live sumptuously are found in royal palaces. Then what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is the one about whom scripture says: ‘Behold, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, he will prepare your way before you.’ I tell you, among those born of women, no one is greater than John; yet the least in the kingdom of God is greater than he.”

(All the people who listened, including the tax collectors, and who were baptized with the baptism of John, acknowledged the righteousness of God; but the Pharisees and scholars of the law, who were not baptized by him, rejected the plan of God for themselves.)

“What did you go out to the desert to see?”

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Today, Jesus Christ asks us three times: “What did you go out to the desert to see? Then what did you go out to see? Then what did you go out to see?” (Lk 7:24.25.26).

Today, Jesus wants to rid us of our eagerness and futile curiosity to know why the Pharisees and masters of the law so arrogantly looked down on God’s plan by ignoring John’s call (cf. Lk 7:30). We must realize that our “knowledge of God” alone will not save us; rather, we must strive to know Him, love Him and follow Him; we need a response from deep inside us that is at once sincere, humble and grateful.

“All the people who listened, including the tax collectors, and who were baptized with the baptism of John, acknowledged the righteousness of God” (Lk 7:29): now is the time for salvation. As St. John Chrysostom preached, now is not the time to be examined, but the time of forgiving. Now and today is the right time; God is always coming nearer and nearer because He is good, He is just and He knows us well, and therefore He is full of a love that forgives; every evening He waits for us, returning home, to embrace us.

And He offers us the gift of His forgiveness and His presence; He breaks whatever distance there may be between us; He knocks at our door. Humbly, patiently, now He knocks at your heart: in your desert, in your loneliness, in your failings, in your incapacity, He wants you to see His love for you.

We must leave behind our comfort and luxury and face reality as it is: disturbed by consumerism and selfishness we have forgotten what God is expecting from us. He wants our love; He wants us for Himself; He wants us truly poor and simple, to be able to give us the news that, despite everything we think we have, we are still awaiting: I am with you, do not be afraid, trust me.

Looking inside us, we may now say in a quiet voice: O Lord, You know me and accept me as I am; open my heart to Your presence; I wish to accept Your love, I wish to welcome You, now that You are coming in silence and peace.

Thoughts on Today's Gospel

- “You may mention Elias who was taken up into heaven, yet he is not greater than John. Enoch was translated, but he is not greater than John.” (Saint Cyril of Jerusalem)

- “The Gospel says that John invited everyone to conversion. The Pharisees and doctors noticed the strength of John, he was a righteous man. They went to him and asked: are you the Messiah? John was clear and did not fall into the temptation of stealing the title. He was a man of truth and did not steal dignity of the Lord.” (Francis)

- “John the Baptist is ‘more than a prophet’ (Lk 7:26) (...) ‘He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit. and I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God.... Behold, the Lamb of God.’ (Jn 1:33-36)” (Catechism Of The Catholic Church, Nº 719)