

Third Sunday of Advent

11 December 2016

"They shall obtain joy and gladness"**Reading 1:** Isaiah 35: 1-6A, 10**Reading 2:** James 5: 7-10**Responsorial Psalm:**

Psalm 146: 6-7, 8-9, 9-10

Gospel:

Matthew 11: 2-11

Gospel Reading: *Matthew 11: 2-11*

When John the Baptist heard in prison of the works of the Christ, he sent his disciples to Jesus with this question, "Are you the one who is to come, or should we look for another?" Jesus said to them in reply, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind regain their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have the good news proclaimed to them. And blessed is the one who takes no offense at me."

As they were going off, 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 clothing? Those who wear fine clothing are in royal palaces. Then why did you go out? To see a prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is the one about whom it is written: *Behold, I am sending my messenger ahead of you; he will prepare your way before you.* Amen, I say to you, among those born of women there has been none greater than John the Baptist; yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he."

Meditation:

Why did Jesus praise John the Baptist as the greatest person born of a woman and then in the same breath say that those who enter God's kingdom will be greater than John (Matthew 11:11)? John is the last and greatest of the prophets of the old covenant. He fulfilled the essential task of all the prophets - to be fingers pointing to Jesus Christ, God's Anointed Son and Messiah. John prepared the way for the Messiah and he pointed others to Jesus the Messiah at the River Jordan when he exclaimed, *Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world* (John 1:29). John saw from a distant what Jesus would accomplish through his death on the cross - our redemption from bondage to sin and death and our adoption as sons and daughters of God and citizens of the kingdom of heaven. When King Herod tried to silence John by throwing him into prison, John sent his disciples to Jesus after John had heard the reports about Jesus performing signs and wonders and speaking to people about the coming of God's kingdom. John wanted his disciples to hear and see firsthand what Jesus was doing to bring the kingdom of God to those who were receptive and ready to receive his message.

The greatness of John's life and witness of the Messiah

When Jesus had answered the disciples of John, he in turn asked them a question. "Why did you go out in the wilderness to see John the Baptist?" "Did you go because you were hungry for the word of the Lord?" Jesus said that John was more than a spokesman for God. John was the faithful witness and friend of the bridegroom who pointed others to the coming of the Messiah in their midst. Jesus contrasted John with the image of a reed shaken by the wind. Unlike a reed which is weak and spineless and can be easily crushed or bruised, John stood as a pillar of strength and truth in the face of opposition and persecution. No demonic force could weaken or crush John in his unswerving trust in God and his word.

Jesus offers us abundant life and joy to be his witnesses

Jesus knew that what the Father in heaven had sent him to accomplish for our sake would supersede all that the prophets had done and foreseen in the past. Jesus' atoning death on the cross cancels the debt of our sins and sets us free to live as citizens of his kingdom. He gives us pardon, healing, and abundant life through his Holy Spirit, and the promise of unending joy with him in his everlasting kingdom.

John the Baptist paid the ultimate sacrifice of his life for speaking God's word and preparing the way for Jesus the Lord and Savior of the world. The Lord Jesus offers us the same assurance of faith and the strength to stand against every force that would try to rob us of our conviction and courage to live and proclaim the *good news* (the *Gospel*) of God's kingdom. Do you know the joy, strength, and power, which Jesus gives to every one who put their trust in him and the power of the Holy Spirit? Ask the Lord Jesus to increase your faith and hope in his promises for you.

Questions for Community Faith Sharing:

- Why was John's role so central to God's salvation story? In what ways are all of us called to continue John's work today?
- If Jesus walked among us today do you think that most people would welcome Him? Who would struggle and resist His message? Who would welcome Him with open arms?

"Lord Jesus, strengthen my trust in your word and my hope in the saving power of your kingdom. Free me from everything that would hold me back from pursuing your kingdom and your will for my life."

OUR PARISH VISION – A PARTICIPATIVE CHRIST-CENTERED COMMUNITY OF DISCIPLES BUILDING THE KINGDOM OF GOD.