



Sunday 14th December 2025

The Third Sunday of Advent

Gospel Reading

Matthew 11.2-11

Messengers from John the Baptist

When John heard in prison what the Messiah was doing, he sent word by his disciples and said to him, 'Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?' Jesus answered them, 'Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them. And blessed is anyone who takes no offence at me.'

Jesus Praises John the Baptist

As they went away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John: 'What did you go out into the wilderness to look at? A reed shaken by the wind? What then did you go out to see? Someone dressed in soft robes? Look, those who wear soft robes are in royal palaces. What then 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,

"See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you,
who will prepare your way before you."

Truly I tell you, among those born of women no one has arisen greater than John the Baptist; yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

Other Readings: Isaiah 35.1-10

Psalm 146.4-10 or Canticle: Magnificat

James 5.7-10

Homily

Have you ever had doubts about your faith; about Jesus? Was he really who he said he was? Was he really God incarnate? Am I really saved because of him? Is it all true?

Are those questions more prevalent when times are tough? Maybe when going through difficult times God may seem distant. It is then that doubts can more easily arise.

John the Baptist was probably in that position.

In today's gospel reading we find John in prison. Clearly life for him is far less than easy or comfortable. His future is uncertain, and fears for his own life were probably not far from his mind.

Up to this point, his life as a prophet had been as one preparing the way for the Messiah. John had recognised Jesus as the Son of God and “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world”. But now, in a dark place physically and spiritually, he seeks answers to his own doubts by sending his disciples to ask: “Are you the one who we’ve been waiting for?”

The way Jesus was conducting his ministry might have fuelled John’s doubts. John had preached that the Messiah would baptise his people with the Holy Spirit and with fire (or judgement). These were John’s expectations and Jesus *would* do these things, but not yet. God does not always act in the way we expect. Jesus was doing things differently and to a different timescale to John’s. So, the question was asked: “Are you the Messiah?”

We may have asked the same question ourselves.

How does Jesus answer?

“Go back and report what you hear and see: the blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor.”

Jesus had a reassuring message for John, and for us too!

He says “look at the evidence!”. Who but the Saviour could do all of these things? In addition, it would not be lost on John that Jesus was also alluding to the prophecies of Isaiah about the Messiah, found in chapters 35 and 61 which refer to these very miraculous acts. Jesus was fulfilling the scriptures

Of course, the biggest miracle of all, Jesus’s resurrection from the dead, had not yet occurred. When *we* have doubts, we have the benefit of not only being able to look at the amazing life of Jesus, but also the resurrection story and conclude that only Jesus, the Son of God, could do that. No-one else in history can make the same claim of defeating death itself!

And if any of us should still doubt, then we are encouraged to look again at the evidence. There are lots of books and video resources that can be accessed. Val Grieve’s book “Your Verdict on the Empty Tomb” is one example. The evidence for the resurrection has turned sceptic lawyers and journalists into followers of Christ. So, if in doubt, check it out!

And one final point of encouragement.

Despite the question sent from John; suggesting his doubts, Jesus is both reassuring and affirming. He honours John both by acknowledging him as a prophet, heralded in scripture, and by proclaiming his greatness.

So, be encouraged. Doubt is not sinful – many followers have experienced it. Doubt raises questions. It is in the answers to those questions (if we look for them) that we will find Jesus, the way, the truth and the life.

Conversation Questions

1. Do you have doubts? When? Who or what helps you to overcome them?
2. “God does not always act in the way we expect”. Have you noticed this or experienced it yourself? Please share what happened and your reaction.
3. Is there anything else from the passage not already discussed that speaks to you? What is it?
4. What will you do this week in your Monday-to-Saturday ministry in response to what you have heard today? #everydayfaith

Prayer

Spend some time in prayer, responding to what you have heard today and listening to what God might be saying to you.

Collect of the day

O Lord Jesus Christ,
who at your first coming sent your messenger
to prepare your way before you:
grant that the ministers and stewards of your mysteries
may likewise so prepare and make ready your way
by turning the hearts of the disobedient to the wisdom of the just,
that at your second coming to judge the world
we may be found an acceptable people in your sight;
for you are alive and reign with the Father
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

(or)

God for whom we watch and wait,
you sent John the Baptist to prepare the way of your Son:
give us courage to speak the truth,
to hunger for justice,
and to suffer for the cause of right,
with Jesus Christ our Lord.

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