

2nd Sunday of Advent “Do our lives point to Jesus?”

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I love visiting bookstores. When I visit a book store and become interested in something written by an unknown author, I try to find endorsements at the beginning of the book from authors I am familiar with. Do you do this? The same thing seems to be happening at the beginning of the Gospel of Mark. And for good reason: you see the original readers of this Gospel, they may not have been very familiar with Jesus Christ, but they probably remembered John the Baptist. The Gospel begins with John the Baptist appearing in the desert proclaiming a baptism for repentance for the forgiveness of sins, and that one mightier than he was coming to baptize with the Holy Spirit. The Gospel says John was clothed in camel’s hair and he fed on locusts and wild honey. This is a very strange diet! For us it would seem the evangelist wants us to consider Jesus’ Gospel on the testimony of a man who eats bugs. For those reading this in the first century, I imagine people would think, this guy is serious. He means business. What elevates John’s ethos of course wasn’t his diet, it was his message. And his message points to Jesus. And we can ask ourselves the question this Advent: Do our lives point to Jesus?

In the office of readings on the first Sunday of Advent we had Cyril of Jerusalem writing in the fourth century. The first two sentences summarize beautifully the spirituality of Advent. He writes, “We do not preach only one coming of Christ, but a second as well, much more glorious than the first. The first coming was marked by patience; the second coming will bring the crown of a divine kingdom.” We saw these two themes in the Scriptures today. Isaiah prophesies the coming of the Lord God, who will rule by his strong arm and will bring comfort and redemption to Israel. In the very first lines of the Gospel of St. Mark, St. John the Baptist appears as the messenger prophesied by Isaiah who would announce the coming of the Lord. In the second reading from St. Peter, we have a very clear reference to the second coming. The day of the Lord will come like a thief when the heavens and earth will pass away and a new heaven and earth will arise according to the Lord’s promise. St. Peter writes to us, “since you await these things, be eager to be found without spot or blemish before him, at peace.”

Although we can do well by sticking with these two themes, in the office of readings for last Wednesday, a third theme of Advent was suggested. St. Bernard of Clairvaux, writing in the 12th century writes, “We know that there are three comings of the Lord. The third lies between the other two. It is invisible, while the other two are visible. The first coming he was seen on earth, dwelling among men; he himself testified that they saw him and hated him. In the final coming all flesh will see the salvation of our God and they will look on him whom they pierced. The intermediate coming is a hidden one; in it only the elect see the Lord within their own selves and they are saved.”

What St. Bernard is suggesting is very profound. During this season of Advent, should we call to mind the first coming of our Lord on Christmas morning? Yes! Should we call to mind the second coming of the Lord at the end of time? Yes! To stop there, however, may be inadequate, unless we realize that Christ is also present to us and to the

world around us through our baptism. In baptism, to paraphrase St. Paul, it is no longer our egos we serve but Christ who now lives in us. If we truly understand the power of our baptism, then the mystery of Christmas can be experienced everyday. Christ is present in the world through those who keep their baptismal promises.

Indeed, the Gospel of St. Mark begins with John the Baptist appearing in the desert proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. People of the whole Judean countryside and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the Jordan River as they acknowledged their sins...And this is what he proclaimed: "One mightier than I is coming after me. I am not worthy to stoop and loosen the thongs of his sandals. I have baptized you with water; he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit." The Gospel of Mark begins with testimony of John the Baptist because his life pointed to Jesus. The purpose of scripture is to point to Jesus. The purpose of discipleship is to point to Jesus. We can ask ourselves: Do our lives point to Jesus? Name one thing we can do this week to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ with our lives.

I invite you to think about this. Christ has baptized us with the Holy Spirit. We can now ask ourselves the question, what does this mean as we prepare for Christmas morning? Will we take the time each day to remember the events that led up to the birth of Christ? Will we remember that Jesus will come again to judge the living and the dead? Will we remember that Christ is alive in this world in those who live their baptismal promises? Will we allow the precious body and blood of Jesus to nourish us and transform us during our Advent journey of life? Will we allow Christ to bless others through us in our thoughts, words, and works of charity making the world around us a better place?

The challenge this week is to prayerfully ask ourselves these questions and answer with a heartfelt "yes!" We say "yes" to the opportunity to grow in discipleship. We say "yes" to the opportunity to make our world a better place. We say "yes" to the opportunity to become more Christ-like in our thoughts, words and deed. My friends, as we go through life waiting for Christ's second coming, may we understand that in a real sacramental way, Christ has never left! Or as St. Theresa of Avila wrote, as I have shared with you a few times before: "Christ has no body now on earth but yours; no hands but yours; no feet but yours. Yours are the eyes through which the compassion of Christ must look out on the world. Yours are the feet which He is to go about doing good. Yours are the hands with which He is to bless His people."

And so, my friends, we have entered into the second week of Advent. The second candle has been lit. We have heard a voice of one crying out in the desert. "Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths."