

3rd Sunday of Advent (Gaudete Sunday), Year C

GOSPEL

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When all the people asked John, 'What must we do?' he answered, 'If anyone has two tunics he must share with the man who has none, and the one with something to eat must do the same.' There were tax collectors too who came for baptism, and these said to him, 'Master, what must we do?' He said to them, 'Exact no more than your rate.' Some soldiers asked him in their turn, 'What about us? What must we do?' He said to them, 'No intimidation! No extortion! Be content with your pay!'

A feeling of expectancy had grown among the people, who were beginning to think that John might be the Christ, so John declared before them all, 'I baptise you with water, but someone is coming, someone who is more powerful than I am, and I am not fit to undo the strap of his sandals; he will baptise 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 in a fire that will never go out.' As well as this, there were many other things he said to exhort the people and to announce the Good News to them.

(Luke 3:10-18)

DID YOU KNOW?

Points of interest and Catholic lore

- Tax collectors at the time of Jesus were disliked immensely for two reasons: they collaborated with the Roman oppressors and they skimmed additional monies from the people for themselves.
- The Jewish people of this time were hopeful that a messiah would come to overthrow the tyranny of the Roman Empire and set them free.
- The word *messiah* in Hebrew means 'anointed one'; the word *Christ* has exactly the same meaning in Greek.

EXPLORING THE WORD

'What must we do?' This is a profound question. The answer does not lie in pious gestures or private devotions. The Baptist is very clear that to be saved, people need to respond to the ways of God by being in right relationship with their neighbour and by living justly. The justice of God is forged in right relationship, so that those who have more share with those who have nothing; so that people are treated fairly and no extortion or violence is used against them. John is inviting his hearers to form a new society, and they begin to suspect that he may be the Messiah. But he is adamant that one more powerful than himself is still to come, bringing a baptism of the Holy Spirit and of fire. At Pentecost, this baptism becomes a reality for the early Church, forming its members into the new society who respond to God's love by imitating the life and the love of the Son. They must now live like the wheat and not like the chaff, fit only to be burnt.

- If we were to ask today, 'What must we do?', how might John answer us?

MAKING CONNECTIONS

Opportunities for group discussion and personal prayer

- 'A feeling of expectancy had grown among the people.' Is there an expectancy growing in you as the coming of Christ draws closer?
- 'What must we do?' Are there things that you can do in your life in order to live more ethically? John's words offer a deep challenge to how people live.
- Make a special effort to live ethically this week. There are many opportunities provided by various church agencies at this time of year to share our wealth or good fortune with those who have little. Share yours.
- Living ethically is not always an easy thing to do. What are some of the challenges of the present age that make it difficult to live ethically? How often do we hear, 'But everyone does it', and what are some of the circumstances about which such a statement is made? How should a Christian respond in such circumstances? Share your reflections.
- Use this week's responsorial psalm as this week's prayer:

*Truly, God is my salvation,
I trust, I shall not fear.*

*For the Lord is my strength, my song,
he became my saviour.*

Cry out with joy and gladness:

For among you is the great and Holy One of Israel.

