

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

GOSPEL

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John in his prison had heard what Christ was doing and he sent his disciples to ask him, 'Are you the one who is to come, or have we got to wait for someone else?' Jesus answered, 'Go back and tell John what you hear and see; the blind see again, and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised to life and the Good News is proclaimed to the poor; and happy is the man who does not lose faith in me.'

As the messengers were leaving, Jesus began to talk to the people about John: 'What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed swaying in the breeze? No? Then what did you go out to see? A man wearing fine clothes? Oh no, those who wear fine clothes are to be found in palaces. Then what did you go out for? To see a prophet? Yes, I tell you, and much more than a prophet: he is the one of whom scripture says:

'Look, I am going to send my messenger before you;
he will prepare your way before you.

'I tell you solemnly, of all the children born of women, a greater than John the Baptist has never been seen; yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he is.'

(Matthew 11:2-11)

DID YOU KNOW?

Points of interest and Catholic lore

- The Word *Messiah* means 'anointed one' in Hebrew. The word *Christ* means the same thing in Greek.
- The healing of those who are afflicted was one of the signs given in the Hebrew Scriptures that the Messiah had come. When the blind see and the deaf hear, when the downtrodden are raised up and the lame walk, the reign of God will have come.
- John the Baptist was arrested and executed by Herod Antipas, son of Herod the Great and ruler of Galilee, because John had criticised Antipas for his marriage to his brother's wife, Herodias, who was also his niece.

EXPLORING THE WORD

As we have already noted, one of the main purposes of Matthew's Gospel is to reveal Jesus as the long awaited Messiah of the Jews to Matthew's largely Jewish community. In this text, Matthew cites the evidence that is before their eyes. Why is it necessary for John to question the identity of Jesus when his own eyes and ears will give him the answer he seeks? The blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised to life, and good news is proclaimed to the poor! Such were the signs of the coming of the Lord that Isaiah had prophesied. Such are the actions that Jesus undertakes! His identity is clear for all who have the eyes to see it.

- How do you recognise Jesus in the events and actions of your life?
- In what ways are we called to continue the actions of Jesus in the world today?
- What do you think is meant by the final line of today's gospel: 'the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he is'?

MAKING CONNECTIONS

Opportunities for group discussion and personal prayer

- When you look at our contemporary world, what do you 'see and hear'?
- How distant is this reality from the kingdom of God?
- Who are the people today who gather 'a great following'? What is their message? How different is that message from the one brought by John?
- Who are some of the 'great' people you have encountered in your life—not those who are famous or wealthy, but those who have had a profound influence on you. Share the memories of the gift you received from such people. Who are the great people who have made timeless contributions to the world? What has been their legacy?
- This week, find ways to be 'good news' to others, especially those who are sick or alienated or marginalised.
- Use today's entrance antiphon as your prayer this week:

*Rejoice in the Lord always; again I say, rejoice.
Indeed the Lord is near.*

NOTES

- Using Bibles, point out the division between the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures and explain, if necessary, the arrangement of chapters and verses.
- Give some brief introductory material on the particular theological perspective and major themes of each of the four gospels.
- Give particular emphasis to the Gospel of Matthew, which will form the basis of catechesis and mystagogy over the coming months.
- Explain how Catholic Christians read the text not as literal history but as the Word of God and as theological reflection on the person of Jesus, his identity and his role in God's plan for the salvation of the world.

After the period of the exile—when Israel had been defeated, the temple destroyed and the people taken into captivity in Babylon—there developed a belief that a Messiah would come, an ‘anointed one’ of God, who would restore Israel’s greatness and usher in a new era characterised by justice, peace and joy. The Messiah was the one who would inaugurate the kingdom or reign of God. The action of this text proclaims that the Messiah has indeed come.

Practical ideas for group leaders to employ in connecting Scripture and daily life, with suggestions for music and environment

- Does your parish community offer opportunities for people to reflect on, discuss or pray the Scriptures outside of the Sunday liturgy? Are there ways in which catechumens can become involved?
- Use the ritual lighting of the Advent wreath candle. You could play some reflective music and spend time in quiet contemplation of the signs of Christ's presence in the world. Pray that all are enriched by their journey through the gospel. Use a suitable Advent song of waiting and yearning. Conclude with the prayer of exorcism in *RCIA* at §94A.
- You could consider giving a Bible to each catechumen as an early Christmas gift and as a means to helping them deepen their faith and understanding.