



Blessed Sacrament Parish
Homily by Father Chris Comerford
December 17, 2017 Third Sunday of Advent

Reading I Isaiah 61:1-2, 10-11

Psalm Luke 1:46-54

Reading II 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24

Gospel John 1:6-8, 19-28

Homily

Last week we heard from the beginning of Mark's Gospel, and tonight we hear the Gospel according to John. I told you that Mark was going to be the Gospel we were going to hear throughout the year, but I also mentioned that Mark was the shortest of the Gospels. Because of that, sometimes in the yearly readings section are taken from John. This is a beautiful witness and John is there to do what? To testify to the light — an image of Jesus as the light of the world and the light that shines in the darkness. It is a powerful image. But clearly John is not the light. He is just to give testimony to give witness to the light.

And so we see that. He is baptizing in the river. He is not the Christ so the leaders are arguing with him. "Who are you to offer this different type of baptism? Are you Elijah?" Why did they ask about Elijah? If you remember from the Old Testament, Elijah did not die. He was taken up to heaven on a fiery chariot so that is why they believed he would come back because he did not die. He went to heaven and would come back to proclaim the coming of the Messiah.

So they ask John who he is, and John answers. "I am the voice of one crying in the desert. Make straight the way of the Lord." This is directly from Isaiah from those sections that speak about the Messiah who is going to come. So he is going to be that voice of helping people to make straight the way of the Lord. This event took place in the desert and it was across the Jordan River leading to the Promised Land.

Then we hear in John's Gospel what we heard last week. John the Baptist says, "I am not even worthy to unstrap his sandal strap. I am not worthy to be the slave of the Messiah, let alone they think I am the Messiah." We know the Messiah is going to bring other things. We heard about the beautiful prophecy from Isaiah, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, to bring glad tidings. Good News." It is a beautiful passage. And we know that it refers to Jesus because that is the passage Jesus chose to read when he got up in the synagogue in Nazareth. He said, "Today this passage is fulfilled in your hearing." It tells us the mission that he would have. And that is why we get excited. John came as a mission to proclaim repentance and to prepare us for Jesus. Because Jesus is going to bring so much more than God's mercy and forgiveness, and more than the opportunity

for salvation. He is going to bring goodness through the many acts he is going to do in the world and to make lives better for people. So that is good news, and we need to be prepared for that.

It gives us reason to rejoice. That is what we heard in the second reading: Rejoice always. Pray without ceasing. It is hard to do, isn't it? To pray all the time, what does it mean when someone prays all day and all night? They go from prayer to prayer to prayer. No To pray without ceasing is having that attitude in our heart to offer all things to God and to speak to God when we have those opportunities, and to allow God into everything that we do. And that is not so easy, is it? There is some time we want to keep for ourselves. We will give God his hour at Mass of Sunday but we think, "God, I'll take the rest of it." No. God should be brought into all things that we do. That is what it means to pray without ceasing. And then even more difficult, in all circumstances — give thanks. Wow. That is a challenge, even in the most difficult cases.

Are we thanking God for all the difficulties and challenges and struggles that we have? It is not necessarily that. We are not saying, "OK, God. Keep giving me more. I am thankful for all these problems. Pile it on." No. We have enough, don't we. We would not ask for that. But we are thanking him to realize that we not alone. That God is with us during all these difficult circumstances, and that is why we are thankful. We can trust God that we do not have to journey alone. That is good news that we hear. These words help us to prepare for the words that are coming.

Advent is short. We only have eight days remaining. But it is still times to put our heart straight, and these past days are the great Novena, the nine days of preparation that begin today leading up to the celebration of Christmas. I think you will enjoy that little book, "The Meditations," that will help us as we go through Advent. We need it even more. If you are like me, I am not ready for Christmas. I have a lot to do this week. But hopefully the "a lot to do" includes lots of prayer, lots of reflection, lots of time with the Lord.

We need that. Let's seek to rejoice. Let's seek to find joy even in the midst of the challenges we face, and even in the midst of the business and craziness of this season. We have a lot to rejoice for and a lot to be thankful for to our God. Let's call God to be with us, to fulfill the promises that he has made that he can truly walk with him. Hopefully that we are not be filled with anger and frustration and sadness and all the things that we feel right now. Let's seek to find joy. That really is part of rejoice, isn't it? To find joy and to open our hearts to our God. Let's seek to learn to do that better each day, especially in these days leading up to our celebration of Christmas.

*Father Christopher Comerford is pastor at Blessed Sacrament Parish in Quincy, IL.
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