

3rd Sunday:

Are you the one who is to come?

Mt. 11:2-11



The 4 stars of Advent

The star of preparation

1st Sunday

Be prepared because the son of man is coming.

(Mt 24,37-44)

The star of choice

2nd Sunday

The kingdom of heaven is at hand.

(Mt 3,1-12)

The star of perplexity

3rd Sunday

Are you the one who is to come?

(Mt 11,2-11)

The star of mystery

4th Sunday

They shall name him Emmanuel.

(Mt 1,18-25)

We already met John in the desert and on the banks of the Jordan River, preaching with great passion to the crowds (cf. Mt. 3:11), but the Liturgy of the Third Sunday of Advent gives us a glimpse of a “different” John. After a time in the vast emptiness of the desert and then alongside the flowing waters of the Jordan, John now sits in a dark prison cell. His thundering, prophetic voice has been reduced to the murmur of a single question: “Are you the one who is to come or should we look for another?” (Mt. 11:3) John, in chains, is tormented by a great fear: the fear of having made a mistake! In fact, the Lord Jesus does not correspond to the fiery figure he proclaimed to the crowds.

The “works of the Christ” (Mt. 11:2), which he hears about from prison, are marked by the logic of a kingdom that does not display the traits of a winnowing-fan (Mt. 3:12), separating grain from husks. By his words and deeds, Jesus reveals himself as a light for the blind, a path for the lame, healing for those who suffer, words for the deaf, hope for those who have lost it, life for those who no longer know what the word means.

John continues to be a prophet up to the very end, paying close attention to what is happening beyond his jail cell so as to reflect on what God is doing and come to understand it. He is not afraid to doubt. Indeed he makes sure that the question that torments him reaches the ears of Jesus himself. The Precursor’s solitude is no longer the fruit of desert silence. It is a solitude that springs from the fear of losing the certitudes he acquired at such great cost. John’s greatness is revealed precisely during this time of inner darkness. He knows how to wait for an answer... He demonstrates his absolute obedience to God by not drawing his own conclusions. Instead, he sends one of his followers to humbly ask Jesus the truth about himself: “Are you the one?”.

The Messiah’s reply casts light on both God and on the identity of the questioner. In fact, Jesus says: “He is more than a prophet!”. In other words, Jesus encourages John to bear witness to him up to its ultimate consequences.

Prayer

Come, Lord Jesus!

Visit us as we languish in different kinds of prisons:

places where no one seeks us out;

places where our questions have no answers;

places where the fear of being mistaken

fills us with discouragement.

Let our vivid memory of John, your messenger and prophet,

enable us to continue our journey toward you.

Let it help us move ahead, placing our trust in divine certitudes, not human ones. Amen.

