

Desert

Third Sunday of Advent

Isaiah 61:1-2, 10-11;
Lk.1:46-50, 53-54;
1 Thessalonians 5:16-24;
Jn. 1:6-8, 19-28

This is the testimony of John. When the Jews from Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to him to ask him, "Who are you?" he admitted and did not deny it, but admitted, "I am not the Christ." So they asked him, "What are you then? Are you Elijah?" And he said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" He answered, "No." So they said to him, "Who are you, so we can give an answer to those who sent us? What do you have to say for yourself?" He said, "I am the voice of one crying out in the desert, 'make straight the way of the Lord,' as Isaiah the prophet said." Some Pharisees were also sent. They asked him, "Why then do you baptize if you are not the Christ or Elijah or the Prophet?" John answered them, "I baptize with water, but there is one among you whom you do not recognize, the one who is coming after me, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to untie."

There are two key words in today's Gospel reading: *testimony* and *joy*. John is a person with a unique duty: to proclaim "the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" and to witness to him so that the world will believe in the One sent by God. John's voice is not that of Christ, but he raises it loudly and clearly to call the people so as to point out the One who will save them. John the Baptist prepares the way for the Messiah, who is about to begin his mission. The conversion he proposes is also valid for us today.

The people of our time love witnesses and John the Baptist teaches us how to fulfill this role by means of his humility and insistence on the truth; by means of his replies to the questions asked of him, and by inviting everyone to search for the truth and realize that the light they are seeking is already in their midst. Today's Gospel underscores the meaning of *joy*: the joy of knowing that the birth of the Savior is drawing near, filling the poor and the oppressed with great hope. The Lord continues to send all Christians out to transmit the joy they received from him to those around them, especially the destitute—those whom it seems that joy has bypassed.

Lord Baden Powell, founder of the Scout movement, offered the scouts the following suggestion as to how to live joyfully: "No matter how poor or small you may be, you can always find someone worse off than you—a person who is perhaps sick, old or handicapped. If you help that person and do your best to make him/her happy, something strange occurs: you discover that by trying to make others happy, you yourself become happier." Joy, therefore, requires profound interior motivation. Believers know they have received everything from God: in this lies the secret of every Christian's strength and joy.

*The spirit of the Lord is upon me;
he has sent me to bring glad tidings to the poor.*

Each individual Christian and every community is called to be an instrument of God for the liberation and promotion of the poor, and for enabling them to be fully a part of society. This demands that we be docile and attentive to the cry of the poor and come to their aid (EG 187).

