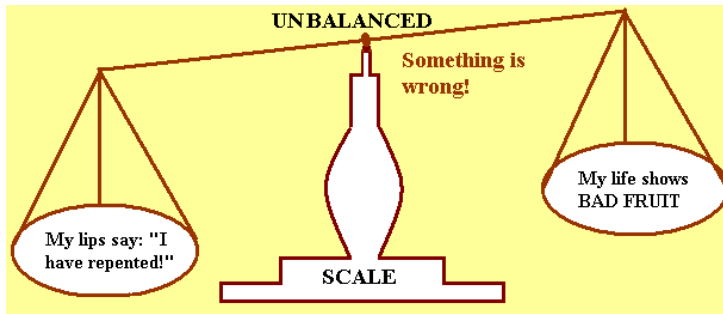


LOOKING AT LIFE THROUGH THE LENS OF THE GOSPEL

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THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

15th December 2024

Luke 3:10 The crowds asked John, “What then should we do?” ¹¹ In reply he said to them, “Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise.” ¹² Even tax collectors came to be baptized, and they asked him, “Teacher, what should we do?” ¹³ He said to them, “Collect no more than the amount prescribed for you.” ¹⁴ Soldiers also asked him, “And we, what should we do?” He said to them, “Do not extort money from anyone by threats or false accusation, and be satisfied with your wages.”

Luke 3:15 As the people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah, ¹⁶ John answered all of them by saying, “I baptize you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. ¹⁷ His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.”

Luke 3:18 So, with many other exhortations, he proclaimed the good news to the people.

John the Baptist’s role as the preacher of repentance is highlighted here in the practical advice given to those who are stirred by his preaching and who ask the all important question: “what must we do?” In keeping with the teaching of the Old Testament, any religion that is worthy of its name must relate to life as it is lived. It must impact on the way that we deal with our neighbours, how we use our influence in relation to people we work with or have power over. In practical terms this means sharing what we have and not exploiting or taking advantage of anyone. This is not an optional extra—it is the only way to live an authentic faith and indeed, in John’s time so also in ours, it is the only way to prepare properly for the coming of Jesus.

SEAN GOAN—Let the Reader Understand, Year C

What shall we do? In response to this question John does not suggest any religious rites, norms or precepts. It is not a question of doing new things or assuming new responsibilities, but of living life differently, of making it more humane, of manifesting something that is already in our hearts: the desire for a life that is more just, dignified and fraternal.

What is crucial and realistic is to open our hearts to God, while becoming aware of the needs of those who suffer. John hits upon a concise answer in a formula that is awesome for its simplicity and truth: “The one who has two tunics should share with the one who has none, and the one who has food should do the same.” It is that simple and clear.

What do we have to say on hearing this message, we who live in a world where a third of humanity lives in misery? Isn’t it shameful to continue to pack our closets with all kinds of ‘tunics’ and stuff our fridges full of food? The way we live our Christian faith doesn’t seem to have the power to transform the affluent society. On the contrary, it is this society that is enervating the heart of the religion of Jesus.

Let us appreciate more and be grateful for the struggle of so many people rebelling against this ‘captivity’. Get involved in concrete acts of solidarity with the poor, and foster a simpler, more austere and human lifestyle.

JOSÉ A PAGOLA—Following in the Footsteps of Jesus, Year C

POINTERS FOR PRAYER

1. “What should we do?” The common thread in John’s answers was to encourage his questioners to be other-centred rather than self-centred, each in the context of their own circumstances. In your experience what difference has it made for you when you changed your attitude in this way?
2. John told the people in a direct and honest way what they should do. Perhaps you have had friends who did not beat about the bush but have told you honestly what they thought about your behaviour when you asked them? In gratitude recall such friends.
3. The humility of John comes out in this passage, happy to acknowledge that he only had a minor role to play in relation to the Messiah. At the same time, he was enthused by his mission to ‘proclaim the good news to the people’. What difference has it made for you when you were able to see the good in yourself, and use your gifts without having to score by portraying yourself as greater than someone else?

JOHN BYRNE OSA—Intercom

“Whenever our interior life becomes caught up in its own interests and concerns, there is no longer room for others, no place for the poor. God’s voice is no longer heard, the quiet joy of [God’s] love is no longer felt, and the desire to do good fades.”

Pope Francis quoted in

TRÍONA DOHERTY & JANE MELLETT—The Deep End

Gospel Comments

On the third Sunday of Advent St Luke gives us a glimpse into the personality of that wonderful person, John the Baptist. In your meditation, let him remind you of great people you have known.

In verses 10 to 14 John speaks openly. Notice how he has a different word for each group which questions him. Notice too how the soldiers feel that even they can get a word of salvation.

Verses 15 to 18 give us a further insight into the kind of person John the Baptist was. He may have said these words in a moment of discouragement, in which case they express his trust that God would complete what was lacking in his ministry. But perhaps they tell us of his humility in the midst of his extraordinary success as a preacher.

MICHEL DE VERTEUIL—Lectio Divina on the Sunday Gospels

Thought for the Day

‘What then should we do?’ is both obvious and pertinent. In the maelstrom of life, it is good to stand back and discern what is being asked of me in the many contexts of life: family member, spouse, parent, disciple, leader, pastor, evangeliser and so forth. In these different roles, how should I be, what should I do so as to enable others to fulfil their own callings as family member, spouse, etc. As in the teaching of John the Baptist, our responses are authentic only if they are practical, down-to-earth and real.

Prayer

Help me, Lord, to recognise in the everyday what you desire of me. Help me to see what are the practical steps I can take from today onwards so as to be a better disciple of your son, Jesus, whom John proclaims today to all who would listen. We ask this through the same Christ our Lord. Amen

KIERAN O’MAHONY OSA—www.tarsus.ie