

LOOKING AT LIFE THROUGH THE LENS OF THE GOSPEL

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THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

14th December 2025

Matt. 11:2 When John heard in prison what the Messiah was doing, he sent word by his disciples ³ and said to him, “Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?” ⁴ Jesus answered them, “Go and tell John what you hear and see: ⁵ the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them. ⁶ And blessed is anyone who takes no offence at me.”

Matt. 11:7 As they went away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John: “What did you go out into the wilderness to look at? A reed shaken by the wind? ⁸ What then did you go out to see? Someone dressed in soft robes? Look, those who wear soft robes are in royal palaces. ⁹ What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. ¹⁰ This is the one about whom it is written, ‘See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you.’

¹¹ Truly I tell you, among those born of women no one has arisen greater than John the Baptist; yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

In his prison cell, up in the stronghold of Machaerus where he is confined by Herod, news of Jesus reached John. He is baffled by what he hears. Jesus does not meet his expectations. He expected a Messiah who would impose himself with the terrible force of the judgement of God, saving those who would accept his baptism and condemning those who rejected it. Who is Jesus?

To get rid of his doubts, John sends two disciples to ask Jesus about his true identity: *Are you the one who was to come or should we expect someone else?* The question was decisive in early Christianity. Jesus' response was not theoretical but very practical and precise: *Go back to John and tell him what you hear and see.* They ask for identity and Jesus responds with his healing work, his serving the sick, the poor and unfortunate people whom he finds in the villages of Galilee, without resources for a better life.

To know Jesus, it is best to see whom he approaches and what he loves to do. To understand clearly his identity, it is not enough to acknowledge theoretically that he is the Messiah, the Son of God. One must also identify with his way of being the Messiah, who is nothing less than to relieve suffering, to heal lives, and to open a horizon of hope for the poor.

Jesus knows that his answer may disappoint those who dream of a powerful Messiah, a judge who condemns human beings. So he adds: *Happy is the one who will not feel let down by me.* Do not expect another Messiah to act differently; let no one invent another Christ more to their liking, because the Son was sent to make life more dignified and happy for everyone, something that will be fulfilled completely in the final feast of the Father.

Which Messiah do we Christians follow today? Do we love to do the things that Jesus did? And if we do not do these things, what are we doing in the midst of the world? What are people “seeing and hearing” in the church of Jesus? What do they see in our lives? What do they hear in our words?

JOSE A PAGOLA - *Following in the Footsteps of Jesus Year A*

In last week's gospel we saw that John was speaking about God's impending judgement. When Jesus comes preaching the kingdom, he does so not with the threat of hellfire but with the offer of unconditional forgiveness and healing for all who would receive it. What Jesus was talking about goes way beyond anything John could have imagined and that, in a sense, is what makes him least in the kingdom of God, where the last will be first and the greatest will be the servant of all.

This is a very apt message as we continue our preparation for Christmas. Familiarity breeds contempt so they say and whatever our grasp of the meaning of Christmas it fails to do justice to its deepest meaning. It is only with the eyes of faith that we can glimpse the kind of transformation Isaiah spoke about in the first reading. We are invited to have the courage to see God in love with the world and we are invited to prepare to live fully in the world without fear because we know that God will never give up on us. Let us pray for a renewed faith this Advent and Christmas so that the wonder and joy of this great feast do not pass by.

SEAN GOAN - *Let the Reader Understand, Year A*

General Comments

You can read verses 2 to 5 as a journey into a deeper faith which John the Baptist made, letting your meditation guide you to interpret this journey from your own experience. What was John's prison? Why did he send disciples? What was the purpose of his question?

You can, on the other hand, concentrate on Jesus, looking at his ministry for example, or, if you prefer, looking at how he responded to the question of John's disciples. You might like to enter deeply into the final saying in verse 6, identifying with the 'blessedness' spoken of by Jesus.

"It is no business whatever of the Christian churches to be keeping people passive and morally well-behaved while all the major questions of their lives are settled by others." Dr John Vincent, President of the Methodist Conference of the United Kingdom

Lord, we pray that when people come to the church,
they may not find us following meekly the dictates of the powerful,
like reeds swaying in the breeze,
nor concerned with fine garments, like people who live in palaces.
May they find a prophet and more than a prophet,
an institution that will show up the false values of our society
and so prepare the way for your chosen ones to carry out your work in the world.

MICHEL DE VERTEUIL - Lectio Divina on the Sunday Gospels, Year A

INITIAL OBSERVATIONS

John the Baptist asked the questions we all ask: *Is this the one?* The question may seem a strange one given that (a) in Luke 1-2 they are supposed to be cousins, and (b) Jesus was a disciple of John. As for (a) it would seem that the family link is a metaphor for their theological relatedness. As for (b) we know very little of their actual relationship. Jesus was indeed a disciple of John. John did baptise Jesus. Jesus started his ministry once John was arrested. It would seem that Jesus saw John as an authentic prophet.

Furthermore, only when John could no longer function did Jesus enter the public arena. How much they knew one another personally remains unanswerable for lack of evidence.

Matt 11:2, 14:12, and other writings agree in speaking of a special group of "John's disciples". Remarkably this witnesses to the continued existence of this distinct group throughout Jesus' ministry. A group of John's adherents continued on to rival Jesus' followers even after John's death.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Joy in believing might seem an "extra" in today's challenging climate for faith. Many of us struggle to hold on, not to mention being exuberant about it all. And yet, of course, there is deep happiness in faith. First of all, everything around is a gift and behind all the gifts there stands a giver. Secondly, love is at the heart of it all, and in faith, nothing is ever "lost" or "wasted". Faith, hope and love endure and the greatest of these is love. Finally, why not "permit" ourselves true joy in all that God has done for us and still does for us in Jesus and in the Holy Spirit.

KIERAN O'MAHONY OSA - www.tarsus.ie

POINTERS FOR PRAYER

1. In response to the question of John, Jesus let his actions speak for him. Some people show by the way they live what it means to be a follower of Jesus. Who has given you such an example? Perhaps there have been times when you have done the same for others.
2. John made a journey of faith from an incomplete knowledge of Jesus to a deeper understanding of who he was. Recall similar steps in your journey of faith.
3. Faith is not primarily about answering abstract theological questions but about living the gospel. What in your life has helped you to get that sense of perspective?
4. John marked the end of an era, Jesus the beginning of a new one. In our lives how do we honour the past and yet be free to move on into a new era?

JOHN BYRNE OSA - *Intercom*

"The problem is not the feeding of the poor, or clothing the naked, or visiting the sick, but rather recognising that the poor, the sick, prisoners, and the homeless have the dignity to sit at our table, to feel 'at home' among us, to feel part of a family. This is a sign that the Kingdom of Heaven is in our midst." (Pope Francis: LET US DREAM)

Jesus' ministry brings restoration to people who are captive, healing to the sick, people set free. Where do you see this in-breaking kingdom of heaven in our society today? Who are the prophets bringing it about?

John has doubts in today's gospel and that's ok. Doubt is not the enemy. It demands to be expressed and explored and offers an opportunity for greater insight and deeper understanding. When have you known this to be true?

TRÍONA DOHERTY & JANE MELLETT—Go Deeper