

3rd Sunday of Advent A

First Reading Isaiah 35:1-6.10

Let the wilderness and the dry-lands exult, let the wasteland rejoice and bloom, let it bring forth flowers like the jonquil, let it rejoice and sing for joy.

The glory of Lebanon is bestowed on it, the splendour of Carmel and Sharon; they shall see the glory of the Lord, the splendour of our God.

Strengthen all weary hands, steady all trembling knees and say to all faint hearts, "Courage! Do not be afraid. Look, your God is coming, vengeance is coming, the retribution of God; he is coming to save you."

Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, the ears of the deaf unsealed, then the lame shall leap like a deer and the tongues of the dumb sing for joy; for those the Lord has ransomed shall return.

They will come to Zion shouting for joy, everlasting joy on their faces; joy and gladness will go with them and sorrow and lament be ended.

Second Reading James 5:7-10

Be patient, brothers and sisters, until the Lord's coming. Think of a farmer: how patiently he waits for the precious fruit of the ground until it has had the autumn rains and the spring rains! You too have to be patient; do not lose heart, because the Lord's coming will be soon. Do not make complaints against one another, brothers and sisters, so as not to be brought to judgement yourselves; the Judge is already to be seen waiting at the gates.

For your example, brothers and sisters, in submitting with patience, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.

Gospel Matthew 11:2-11

John in his prison had heard what Christ was doing and he sent his disciples to ask him, "Are you the one who is to come, or have we got to wait for someone else?" Jesus answered, "Go back and tell John what you hear and see; the blind see again, and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised to life and the Good News is proclaimed to the poor; and happy is the man who does not lose faith in me".

As the messengers were leaving, Jesus began to talk to the people about John: "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed swaying in the breeze? No? Then what did you go out to see? A man wearing fine clothes? Oh no, those who wear fine clothes are to be found in palaces. Then what did you go out for? To see a prophet? Yes, I tell you, and much more than a prophet: he is the one of whom scripture says: Look, I am going to send my messenger before you; he will prepare your way before you.

I tell you solemnly, of all the children born of women, a greater than John the Baptist has never been seen; yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he is."

Meditation

Today we meet the Baptist overcome with doubt, locked by the powerful in the shadowy and forbidding dungeon. The Messiah whom he recognized does not act as a sovereign judge, nor as the merciless executor of divine sentences against the impious. Confused and distressed, John has his followers question Jesus: "Are you the Messiah whom we await? You, the non-violent one, the patient one, the merciful one?" This question which spans the centuries seizes us today more than ever when we are confronted by the apparent silence of God in our de-Christianised society. We had hoped the Gospel would give us answers; instead it raises questions. We had hoped for ready-made solutions. Instead, it invites us to seek them out. We had hoped for spectacular signs. Instead, the kingdom subjects itself to the laws of slow germination. So often it is difficult for us to admit that Christianity is a freeing and loving way of life – a life of faith and risk! Like John,

we too must enter into the Advent of our faith and recognize the image which God chose in the humble, merciful, liberating person of Jesus Christ.

The signs of his coming are among us, hidden, but alive. Through faith, many Christians incarnate the Word of God in our generation. They already begin to change the world and throw down the walls of our prisons. In greater numbers Christians are assuming responsibility for the Church.

They go in the name of the gospel to offer service to the poor. They never cease to pray that they might burn with the fire of Jesus' love. These contemporary prophets of the Messiah know that patient hope impels us to action.

Why then do we wait to join the ranks of those who, in working for the Advent of God, are promoting humanity's true coming of age?