

DECEMBER 17, 2017

Third Sunday of Advent

Reading 1 [IS 61:1-2A, 10-11](#)

Responsorial Psalm [LK 1:46-48, 49-50, 53-54](#)

R. (Is 61:10b) **My soul rejoices in my God.**

Reading 2 [1 THES 5:16-24](#)

Gospel [JN 1:6-8, 19-28](#)

A man named John was sent from God. He came for testimony, to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to testify to the light.

And 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." This happened in Bethany across the Jordan, where John was baptizing.

HOMILY:

Viktor Frankl, the clinical psychologist and Holocaust survivor, in his remarkable book *Man's Search for Meaning*, described the importance he discovered, while in the Nazi Concentration Camp at Dachau, regarding the importance of faith in the future on the survival of the prisoner. As a psychologist, he chose as his mission in that hellish camp to study the effects of the extraordinary suffering and degradation on the human soul, to prepare himself to write about it once he was liberated. He wrote, "The prisoner who had lost faith in the future—his future—was doomed. With his loss of belief in his future, he also lost his spiritual hold; he let himself decline and became subject to mental and physical decay" (74). He then went on to provide a case study of his fellow prisoner, who he calls simply F—.

"I once had a dramatic demonstration of the close link between the loss of faith in the future and this dangerous giving up. F—, my senior block warden, a fairly well-known composer and librettist, confided in me one day: 'I would like to tell you something, Doctor. I have had a strange dream, A voice told me that I could wish for something, that I should only say what I wanted to know, and all my questions would be answered. What do you think I asked? That I would like to know when the war would be over for me. You know what I mean, Doctor, *for me!* I wanted to know when we, when our camp, would be liberated and our sufferings come to an end.' 'And when did you have this dream?' I asked. 'In February 1945,' he answered. It was then the beginning of March. 'What did your voice answer?' Furtively he whispered to me, 'March thirtieth.' When F— told me about his dream, he was still full of hope and convinced that the voice of his dream would be right. But as the promised day drew nearer, the war news which reached our camp made it appear very unlikely that we would be free on the promised date. On March twenty-ninth, F— suddenly became very ill and ran a high temperature. On March thirtieth, the day his prophecy had told him that war and suffering would be over for him, he became delirious and lost consciousness. On March thirty-first, he was dead. To all outward appearances, he had died of typhus." [Frankl was liberated four weeks later.]

Frankl concluded about his friend: “The ultimate cause of my friend’s death was that the expected liberation did not come and he was severely disappointed. This suddenly lowered his body’s resistance against the latent typhus infection. His faith in the future and his will to live had become paralyzed and his body fell victim to illness—and thus the voice of his dream was right after all [: his suffering from the war was over at the end of March]” (74-75).¹ For Frankl, this discovery was not just for the concentration camp prisoner, for he saw, after his liberation, that modern man’s lack of faith and a vision of the future left him equally vulnerable for a listlessness of life that had as its trajectory both spiritual and physical decay. When our hope in the future is over, so too is, for all intents and purposes, our life, or certainly our will to live.

But . . . who can know the future? How can we have any confidence in something we cannot see? The answer is the same as that for the concentration camp prisoner that Frankl observed. The voice that spoke to the prisoner, as described by Frankl, the one that spoke to a faith in a future deliverance, was a prophecy of liberation. Therefore, to know the future, **we’ll need a prophet**. *A prophet is someone who can speak to the hope of the future*. Where to find a prophet? As it turns out, life is not about finding a prophet. Instead, the prophet will have to find us. In fact, many so-called prophets will vie for our attention. How can we know which ones are reliable, and which ones will we heed? Which voices speak to our hopes? Which voices speak to our values, to the kind of life we desire? Which promise life but only deliver lifelessness? To which are we listening? Frankl discovered, in one of the most hellish places on earth, a truth that is valid wherever we might be: that without a prophetic voice, our souls (and eventually bodies) will decay and die. While we may want to say, “I don’t listen to any voice but my own,” in honesty, Frankl’s example displays that, once another voice of hope departs, what does remain IS OUR SINGULAR INTERIOR VOICE, which looks to the struggles of this life and despairs. For, we are not sufficient in ourselves to contend with life’s trials—we need a voice of hope that is capable of seeing beyond immediate trials to new life beyond them.

At this moment, I must *cut to the chase* and say: that voice alone is that of Jesus. Only He can see into the eternity prepared for us, a future full of hope. Into life’s all too often darkness, we have a prophet in today’s gospel who speaks to the light, John the Baptist. But, he is not the light, but has come to testify to the true light that enlightens the future with hope: Jesus Christ, the Light of the World. Jesus is the prophet *par excellence*, whose words alone are the source of life, light, and hope. In fact, he is our *spes unica*, our only hope. Finding no hope as you look around this most flawed, pained and fallen world? Of course you can’t find hope, because you are not a prophet! You need one to speak beyond trials to deliverance, beyond suffering to life, beyond despair to hope. Our vision is just not wide enough! But there is One who can see: the Lord Jesus, God with us, the Word made flesh, the light who has come into the darkness, and darkness could not overcome Him.

Friends, listening to the prophetic voice of Jesus literally and actually a matter of life or death: Death when we rely only on our vision, which can only see our trials and limitations; Life when He shows us beyond human vision the future full of hope and prepared for us. Feeling hopeless, listless, and fearful. You need to listen to another voice. You need a prophet. You need Jesus.

¹ Frankl, Viktor. *Man’s Search for Meaning*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2006.