

3 Advent C SML 2018
LK 3:10-18

Our Blessed Lord did not just descend upon the people of God from the obscurity of Nazareth without warning. Rather, one last time before hearing the voice of the Messiah, the people of God once again heard the voice of a prophet which had been silent for 150 years.

The news went through the entire country that in the Judaeian desert a preacher had appeared, not like the mumblers of dead men's ideas who spoke in the synagogues, or the smooth-tongued teachers of Jerusalem, but a rude, strong man, speaking from the heart to the heart, with the authority of one who was so sure of his inspiration.

He was a Nazarite from the womb, lived for years in the desert, and wandered, in communion with his own heart, beside the lonely shores of the Dead Sea. He was clad in the hair cloak and leather girdle of the old prophets; and his asceticism sought no finer fare than locusts and the wild honey which he ate in the wilderness.

Yet he knew life well. He was well acquainted with all the evils of the time, the hypocrisy of the religious parties, and the corruption of the masses. He had a wonderful power of

searching the heart and shaking the conscience, and without fear laid bare the sins of everyone:

- ✓ from tax collectors,
- ✓ to soldiers,
- ✓ to Herod,
- ✓ to the crowds at large.

He left no one out. Today's gospel.

John the Baptist was on everyone's lips. People spoke of him as the prophet who had been denied them for some 150 years. The Hebrew people expected prophets, so to not have one for 150 years – John the Baptist was seen as someone who interrupted what people experienced as a life of disconcerting drought. People from all over Judaea and Galilee flocked to hear him speak. Today we would say he was the object of something akin to a pilgrimage. Even Jesus went to see him. The Pharisees were eager to hear the Messianic news; the Sadducees were stirred for a moment from their lethargy. The provinces sent their thousands to hear his preaching.

What most attracted attention to him and thrilled every Jewish heart from one end of the land to the other, was his

message. It was nothing less than the Messiah is at hand, and is about to set up the kingdom of God.

But what they also heard was something unexpected, which excited very different feelings in different minds. He had to tell his hearers they were utterly unprepared for the Messiah; that their descent from Abraham was in and of itself not sufficient for admission to His kingdom. Hence the reason why John did not go into the cities and towns, and therefore he did not baptize just anywhere, but where Israel had once crossed the Jordan to enter the Promised Land.

Lest there be misunderstanding, there needs to be clarification. When we speak of Israel, and the mindset of Old Testament Israel, Israel's Old Testament prophets since Amos all spoke just as severely and without compromise as did John. But John the Baptist's prophecy was received into the New Testament and therefore John's prophecy applies to every Christian and to every Church.

Today, in 2018, when we talk of eschatology, or "the study of the last things," we usually speak of four things when life as we know it will change when we finally meet God:

- ✓ judgement,
- ✓ and depending on how that goes,

- ✓ heaven,
- ✓ hell
- ✓ and purgatory.

And we automatically throw that to something distant and remote.

However, when we talk about the eschatology of John the Baptist, we're talking of something completely different. John's eschatology is now, when life as we know it changes now, because we are about to meet God now in the person of Jesus Christ now! That life is about to change is something near, something breathing down our necks, something now.

So the response at the time of John the Baptist was mixed. Many were stirred with fear and hope and submitted to the rite in the River Jordan. Others submitted to the rite but just went through the motions. And third, many more were irritated by the exposure of their sins and turned away in anger and unbelief. Among those were the Pharisees upon whom he was especially severe, and who were deeply offended because he had treated so lightly their descent from Abraham, on which they placed all their bets.

Today, faced with religion and rationality, we understand and experience:

- ✓ the supremacy of God,
- ✓ our distance from God,
- ✓ and the disproportion between God and us

Religious experience is precisely the lived awareness of how small we are compared to God.

And yet, the announcement transmitted down through the years since the prophecy of John the Baptist is a man who ate, walked, and lived a normal life proclaimed, "I AM your destiny. I AM He of who made the whole Cosmos. I AM not declaring myself divine in a generic way as did the pharaohs, Roman, Japanese, Chinese and Inca emperors, and Dalai Lamas. I AM God because I AM.

Today, there are those who approach the font of Baptism and become members of the Catholic Church with good intention, the love of God and truly find their value in being a child of God.

There are others who approach the font of Baptism and just go through the motions.

And there are still others who turn away from John's announcement and would be satisfied if they could confine John's announcement within the walls of this Church. You can believe what you like behind those walls, those walls of St.

Mary of the Lakes, but not out here in the public square. And these are the same people who would be just as satisfied to find an excuse, not a reason, but an excuse not to darken the doorstep of a Church.

Some are struggling now with the current crisis, myself included. But to those who say they won't be going to Church because of it, I'd like to share this thought.

We know Satan does not want us to go to Church. Because in Church we worship God now, and simple elements of bread and wine are consecrated into God. At the end of every Mass on the altar is God now, Jesus Christ, true God and true Man, Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity now. Hence, John the Baptist's eschatology NOW! And again, Satan wants us to have none of This, none of God, not just now, but never.

If you think not going to Church to worship God now and receiving God now, in your heart and in your hand now, is the right thing to do, then you are saying that not going to Church to receive Him would be God's will, because doing the right thing is always God's will. And that means God and Satan are "now" on the same page. So your "now" is God and Satan are on the same page, for the first time since the Devil and his

angels were cast from heaven. God and Satan, now on the same page . . . No! That can never be!