

3 Advent: Called To Be Apostles and Witnesses

"There was a man named John, sent by God to give testimony to the Light." The first words of today's gospel tell us everything we need to know about John the Baptist. He was sent to give testimony. *He was sent.* The word in the original Greek is *apostolein*, apostle. To give testimony, the word in the original Greek is *marturios*, martyr. John the Baptist is an apostle and a martyr. Actually, John was the first apostle. He was the first one sent to proclaim the presence of the Christ. He was also the first Christian martyr. John was the first one to give testimony to the truth of Christ among us. He realized that Divine Truth had entered the world as a human being. This was no time to hedge on the truth. John would rather die than turn from the truth. And he did die, a martyr to Truth.

Like John the Baptist we also have been called to be apostles and witnesses. We have been entrusted with a mission from God. We are created for a purpose. We were given God's life at baptism so we can share his life with others. We are his witnesses. We are called to make the presence of Christ a reality in our worlds by giving witness to his presence in our own lives.

The world needs our witness to Christ so badly. Look how evident that is right now, just eleven days before Christmas. Some claim that Christ does not exist, or that if he exists he has lost his impact upon the world. With this as the basis of their lives, they condemn themselves to a life of frustration. Because they reject Christ, they reject his cross and find themselves incapable of putting sacrifice for others before their own selfishness. The cross of the Lord is our salvation. It saves us from evil. It saves us from selfishness. It saves us from ourselves.

It is politically correct to demand that all mention of Jesus be taken out of Christmas. It's very name is to be changed to "Winter Holidays". Here's a secret that I don't want you to tell the politically correct: the word *holiday* come from the union of two words *holy* and *day*. Holy Days were always days off from work. Sadly, at the heart of those who oppose a religious significance to Christmas is their desire to transform the celebration of Christ's presence among us to the exact opposite of the whole reason why God sent his Son. They reject Christ and contort Christmas into a celebration of materialism. Sadly for so many people in our country, their Christmas models their lives: shallow, empty, meaningless.

The world that has rejected Jesus Christ needs witnesses to His Presence. The world needs new John the Baptists to point to Jesus. We are called to be these witnesses. We are called to stand up before friends, families, working companions, or maybe just that idle acquaintance on an airplane, and say, with our lives more than our words, "For me, the Life of Christ is more important than anything the world can offer." And if this is a reality, at the core of our being, the Holy Spirit that is within us will convince others of the truth of our witness.

We are called to wear a cross, not just around our necks but imprinted upon our

very being. We are called to sacrificial lives. We are called to sacrificial love. We recognize the presence of Christ in our families, among our immediate society, and throughout the world. We are called to reverence God in every action of our lives because our commitment to Christ in the whole reason for our lives.

The very world that has rejected Jesus craves his presence. People complain about a world in darkness. They fill bookshelves with self help books and books telling them where to find meaning in life. They search for light everywhere except the most obvious place. They overlook the presence of Christ among them and even within them. This is where we come in. We have been sent by God. We are the new apostles. We have been called, chosen, to lead people out of the cave of darkness into the Light of the Lord.

We have been called to be witnesses. We are the new witnesses, and in many ways, the new martyrs. We give testimony to the Truth of the Lord even if this testimony takes a personal toll on us in our homes, at our workplace or in our neighborhoods. We are the new John the Baptists, apostles and witnesses. We have a responsibility to the world around us to reflect the presence of Christ. Others need to find Jesus. Others need the testimony of those who are sent by God.

We, apostles and witnesses, the new Baptists, will best prepare for Christmas if we spend time determining how we can better be faithful to our mission of reflecting God's presence in the world.

“Rejoice in the Lord always, again I say rejoice.” The message of this Third Sunday of Advent is simple: Our lives must lead others to rejoice in the Light.

“There was a man sent by God to give testimony to the Light.” May we have the courage to continue the work of John the Baptist.