

Third Sunday of Advent: The Search for Truth

He was quite a sight, this John the Baptist. He wore clothes of camel hair, and had a leather belt around his waste. His food was locusts and wild honey. He told people things that they may not have wanted to hear. Perhaps you remember last week's gospel. In it John the Baptist called the Pharisees and Sadducees a brood of vipers and told them that they could not expect salvation just because they were sons of Abraham. He told everyone that they needed to repent. He called people sinners. And yet they crowded around him. They went out into the desert to hear him. John the Baptist was so popular that his message was carried throughout the Roman Empire. When St. Paul first went to Ephesus he found people there who had heard of John, even been baptized by John, but who had not heard of Jesus or of the Holy Spirit. John the Baptist was so popular that the writer of the Fourth Gospel, the *Gospel of John*, had to make it very clear in the prologue to his Gospel that John the Baptist was not the Light but came to give witness to the Light.

And now John was in jail, in King Herod's prison to be exact. He was there because he did what he had been doing all along, proclaim the truth regardless of the ramifications. He told Herod that it was not right that he should marry his brother's wife. This was not a politically healthy statement. It ended up costing John his life.

Before he was executed, John inquired about this Jesus who was now attracting crowds of his own. Jesus sent John's disciples back to him to report that the signs of the Messiah were all around: the blind recovered their sight, cripples walked, lepers were cured, the deaf heard, the dead were raised to life, and the poor had the good news preached to them.

Then Jesus spoke to the crowd. "What did you go out to the desert to see?" What attracted you to John. Was it because he said what was popular, what was trendy? Was John a reed swayed by the wind? Blowing one way one day, another way another day. Or was John a proclaimer of the truth? The people Jesus spoke to had to admit it: they were mystified by John's words because they were straight forward and true. John did not care about anything other than the truth. People were sick of a world where every fact could be bent a dozen ways to serve the interest of the speaker. They were sick of the Romans and the Greeks using their adroitness with language to twist the law or to twist logic to justify horrible, abominable actions. They were sick of the Temple priests, and the Jewish religious parties, the Sadducees and Pharisees, using religion for their own gain. They just wanted they truth. It attracted them. John fascinated them because he was not afraid of the truth.

People are no wiser now than they were back in Jesus' day. The way that people form their own concepts of reality was no different in Jesus' day than it is now. People are still molding facts to suit their desires and needs. People are still

using religion for their own personal gain. The truth is still very hard to find in our world.

We have all witnessed family, friends and neighbors twisting truths to justify every abominable action imaginable. Books are available that justify every sort of abomination you can imagine. Or would rather not think about. Many people have discarded the belief that we will be judged by God according to our actions. They would rather see God as some sort of a Barney that will sing “I love you, you love me” to us for all eternity even if we spent significant portions of our lives singing to God, “I hate you and all you demand of me.” The concept of universal laws has been rejected. It was brushed aside by an misuse of the word “values” so that the ten commandments have really been turned into the ten suggestions. Many college professors report that nearly all of the students who enter the classroom believe that the truth is relative. Why then should be so surprised that the truth is whatever people want it to be?

Not all people see the truth this way. There are very good people in our day in our society, just as there were very good people in Jesus’ day in Jesus’ society. There are good people who have had enough of the perversion of truth. They are attracted to anyone who will stand for the truth, regardless of whether it is popular or not, whether it is convenient or not, whether it is politically correct or not. There are good people who just want the truth. They do not want a reed bent by the wind. They want a John the Baptist who will die rather than sway from the truth.

What do we want to hear when we come to Church? Do we come to hear a priest saying that sin does not exist, or that maybe for us this or that sin does not really matter? Or are we attracted to the Church because we are good people and we want to hear the truth no matter how popular or unpopular it may be?

I am convinced that we go to Church because we are good people, who want to be better people. I am convinced that we go to Church because like the people who went out into the desert to see John the Baptizer, we are attracted by the truth. I am convinced that we go to Church because like the people of Jesus’ day, we are disgusted with those elements of society that pervert truth to serve their own needs. More than this, I am convinced that all of us want to be freed of the darkness within ourselves that threatens to enslave us in our own selfishness. The truth alone can set us free.

This truth that sets us free is more than a concept. It is the Spirit of Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit.

“I am the way, the truth and the life.”

In a world that would relativize and pervert every aspect of life to serve its own self interests, in a world of darkness, we have found light. That light is Jesus

Christ.

“Are you the Messiah, Jesus, or should we look for another?” John the Baptist’s disciples asked. People of Good Will, people who have heard angels singing Gloria, have asked the same question throughout the ages. “Look around,” responded Jesus. The signs of the Messiah are all around you. The time of light is upon you.

Rejoice! It is Gaudete Sunday. Rejoice Sunday. Our joy is far more profound than the superficial happiness of contrived Christmas emotions. We rejoice because the light of truth has destroyed the darkness of sin. We rejoice because we have been drawn by the truth. We rejoice because Jesus Christ is the truth. He embodies the truth. He is the truth. And He and the truth are, as the *Letter to the Hebrews* states, “The same, yesterday, today and forever.”