Third Sunday of Advent: Heralds of the Gospel

Who was this John the Baptist?

In the Gospel for today we hear him declare that he is not Elijah, not the prophet Moses spoke about, nor is he the anointed one, the Christ. Who was this John the Baptist? The first words of today's gospel tell us everything we need to know about him. He is the one who 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, Apostle and 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.

This week we are called to be like John the Baptist. We are called to be apostles and witnesses. We have been entrusted with a mission from God. We have been 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 deeply needs our witness to Christ. Look how evident that is right now, just two weeks before Christmas. For many people Christmas has become a pagan celebration. Materialism is their god. All mention of spirituality is rejected. Go to New York City and look at the famous holiday displays in the store windows. There is little to no mention of Christ's birth. The main theme is magic. Many people claim that Christ does not exist, or that if he ever did exist 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. They demand that all mention of Jesus be taken out of Christmas. They want the feast of Christ's presence among us to become the exact opposite of the whole reason why God sent his Son. They reject Christ and contort Christmas into a celebration of materialism. Their Christmas models their lives: shallow, empty, meaningless. They hurt. They deeply need this Messiah whose life they have rejected. But where can they find him?

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, "For me, the Life of Christ is more important than anything the world can offer." If this reality is present in 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, for 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. The world that has rejected Christ is made up of the lowly, the brokenhearted, those who are captive to the gods of materialism. They are seeking meaning to life, but they do not know where to find it.

We are the new heralds of the Kingdom. We have been sent by God. We are the new apostles. We are the new witnesses. We are the new martyrs. 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 fulfill our mission of reflecting God's presence in the world.

"There was a man named John, sent by God to give testimony to the Light." People whose lives are in darkness are seeking meaning, are seeking light. May our lives lead others to rejoice in the Light of Christ.