

ADVENT SUNDAY III "A"  
DECEMBER 14/15, 2019

It's quite a change isn't it? Last Sunday's gospel reading all but brimmed over with John the Baptist's confidence and his clear and compelling call for repentance. One almost expected some type of Quentin Tranantino movie with all its explosive special effects as John warned of God's impending wrath being loosed.

Today, John's tune changes markedly. Now sitting alone in a dark and dank cell, John questions his earlier confidence and perhaps his mission and identity, and so sends disciples to go and ask Jesus a poignant, even a heartbreaking question: are you the one who is to come, or should we look for another? Fire and brimstone confidence had turned to uncertainty and despair. Anticipation to disappointment. Hope to desperation. The move is not unfamiliar to us. We regularly charge ahead with our dreams and plans, marching forward with optimism about the future, only to be arrested and caught up short, whether by cancer, or loss of employment, or the death of a loved one, or the loss of a relationship, or any of a thousand other things that cause us suddenly to stumble and lose our confidence and question our faith.

This is all the harder at this time of year when the manufactured cheeriness of the season seems to belittle our challenges or even make us feel inadequate because of our struggles. Which is why today's readings, especially the Gospel, may be just the thing we need on this third Sunday in Advent, the day marked by the wearing of rose-colored vesture and the kindling of the "candle of joy" on the Advent wreath. Today's liturgy introduces a little reality in our progress toward Bethlehem, that even while we anticipate the birth of the Christ child, give thanks for that gift, and believe that his death and resurrection promises new and eternal life, yet still things can be quite difficult in the meantime. Here is where the virtue of patience advocated by the author of the letter of James in our second reading offers us hope. Just as a farmer must await with patience the natural process of the germination and growth of the seed planted in the ground through the seasons of favorable and unfavorable weather toward a hoped for harvest, so too we are called to faith and hope that the good seed of God's grace in Jesus sown in us in baptism, nourished through the Holy Eucharist and our prayer, subject to the favorable and unfavorable

climes of life, will in God's good time yield the harvest of the Kingdom in our lives and our world.

The picture of John the Baptist sharing his doubts can reassure and remind us that doubt is not the opposite of faith, that those who believe that the Christian life is one seamless march forward from success to success, or from less faith to more, haven't been paying attention. Jesus came, and comes, as Emmanuel *God with us*, the one who does not eliminate all our troubles but accompanies us through them; the one who holds on to us when the world feels like it's falling apart, the one who enters into our suffering and struggle and reminds us that we are not alone; the one who promises to bring us through all things even ultimately through death to new life.

The Prologue to the Gospel of John read at the third Mass of Christmas, the Mass during the day, does not say that Jesus, the Word made flesh and light of the world, vanquishes the darkness but rather shines on in the midst of it, and the darkness can neither comprehend nor conquer such light. And so on this Third Sunday in Advent we continue to wait. Waiting can be hard, accustomed as we are to almost instantaneous results at the push of a button—Mediacom Extreme or Amazon Prime for example. Waiting is hard, but it is part of the Christian life. But our waiting is not an inactive "sitting on our hands." Advent calls us to wait, but to wait through activity. We believe Christ is coming to bring healing, peace, justice and hope, but since Christ has already come and has given us the gift of the Holy Spirit, we wait for a new experience of his coming by ourselves being about the work of bring healing, peace, justice and hope to our families, parish and world. Our parish's monthly Black Bag collection, ministries such as Bereavement, Stephen Ministry, Homebound visits with Holy Communion, and Immigration assistance—are some of the ways we wait even in the face of hardship and setbacks—ultimately trusting that God is as good as his word, his promise.

15 December, 2019  
Father Jim Secora