



Father Laurence Kriegshauser, O.S.B. – Homily for Third Sunday in Advent 2010

John the Baptist had been imprisoned by Herod Antipas for condemning Herod's marriage to his brother's wife, although this story is not told till a later chapter in Matthew's Gospel. Here we see the imprisoned John sending messengers to find out if Jesus is the expected Messiah, the one whose coming he was sent to announce. Jesus answers the question by pointing to his own deeds, six activities which show him to be the divinely appointed savior. Three of these activities were mentioned in the first reading, a prophecy of Isaiah in which the coming of God will result in the eyes of the blind being opened, the ears of the deaf being cleared, and the lame leaping like a stag. Jesus has accomplished all these deeds as well as cleansing lepers, raising the dead, and preaching good news to the poor.

John and the hearers of Jesus are left to infer the answer to the question who Jesus is. He is certainly the one who is to come, in the sense that Jews of the first century were expecting an anointed son of David to come and rule the country bringing a reign of peace. Jesus is also a prophet like Moses who God had promised would come to speak God's own words to his people. So Jesus is both the expected Son of David and the prophet like Moses. But he is also far more. The prophecy of Isaiah shows that he is God himself come to bring life and salvation to his people. Jesus himself never claimed this in so many words: he simply performed deeds that only God could perform, like raising from the dead, walking on the sea, forgiving sin, defining the law of God. He appealed simply to his own sovereign authority and asked only that men acknowledge him as Lord. That's what he meant when he said, "Blessed is the one who takes no offense at me." Blessed is the one who welcomes my coming in the flesh rather than tries to destroy me or accuse me of blasphemy.

We too are called to welcome the coming of Jesus in the flesh, to open ourselves to receive the healing he brings of body, mind, and spirit. The prophecy of Isaiah imagines all the people healed by God walking joyfully along a road across the desert, a desert now in rich bloom, from their exile in Babylon to a restored Jerusalem. "Those whom the Lord has ransomed will return and enter Zion--that is the mountain on which Jerusalem and its temple are built--singing crowned with everlasting joy; they will meet with joy and gladness, sorrow and mourning will flee." This is God's plan for restoring the world in Christ. It is a plan we see fulfilled in the Church, the assembly of those who believe in Christ and come to the Eucharist to receive a share in his risen life. The church lives with the life of Christ, that is, with the life of God on earth. We come to Church because we believe that and want to be filled again with that life.

But our life is hidden with Christ in God, it is not completely manifest, it is in our hearts and has yet to transform our bodily illnesses and our subjection to death. That is why we wait for the fullness of our salvation with longing and hope and patience. "Be patient," says Saint James, "until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient with it until it receives the early and the late rains." "Make your hearts firm," he goes on to say, "because the coming of the Lord is at hand." Then he says how this patience should show itself in our treatment of one another:



SAINT LOUIS ABBEY



Do not complain, brothers and sisters, about one another, that you may not be judged. Our vision of the Lord reigning over the world should make us patient and tolerant with one another.

There is a delay in the coming of the Lord. We do not yet see the world transformed, the blind all healed, the lame walking, the righteous rewarded, the world living at peace. We are in the in-between time: the Messiah has come and sits at the right hand of the Father but all the world is not yet subdued to him. Our part is to pray with longing for the coming of his kingdom, to rejoice in our hearts at the certainty of his victory, and to offer ardently this sacrifice with Jesus himself for the redemption of all people, those we know and love who are hurting and those whose sufferings we know about in only a general way. By joining ourselves to him in his offering of himself to the Father, we are being conformed to him as his brothers and sisters, giving ourselves for the redemption of this world which God will manifest in his own time. Come, Lord Jesus.