

ADVENT REFLECTIONS - WEEK TWO

GOSPEL: Matt 11:2-10

At that time : When John had heard in prison the works of Christ, sending two of his disciples, he said to Him: Art Thou He that art to come, or look we for another? And Jesus making answer, said to them: Go and relate to John what you have heard and seen. The blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead rise again, the poor have the Gospel preached to them; and blessed is he that shall not be scandalized in Me. And when they went their way, Jesus began to say to the multitudes, concerning John: What went ye out into the desert to see? A reed shaken with the wind? But what went ye out to see? A man clothed in soft garments? Behold, they that are clothed in soft garments are in the houses of kings. But what went ye out to see? A prophet? Yea, I tell you, and more than a prophet. For this is he of whom it is written: Behold, I send my angel before thy face, who shall prepare thy way before thee.

HOMILY BY ST JEROME:

- I. When John the Baptist sent his disciples to Jesus, in order to question Him about His mission, he was not ignorant either of His advent or of His dignity as the Messiah. He knew that Jesus was the Lamb of God Who taketh away the sin of the world, for he had shown Him to others who had no knowledge of His divine nature. Indeed, the precursor had heard the almighty voice of the Father giving testimony : This is My beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased (Matt 3:17). Now we know that our Saviour asked the Jews to show Him the place where Lazarus had been buried, though He knew it well, so that those who would accompany Him thither, should begin to believe in His divine mission, when witnessing the miracle of the raising of Lazarus, that was to follow. In the same way John, who was to be condemned to death by Herod, sent his disciples to Jesus, that by witnessing His miracles and the operation of His divine and almighty power, they might believe in Him, as well as receive instruction from the Divine Teacher Himself, Whom they could then question as their personal teacher. It seems that St. John's disciples were angry with our Lord; for the question shortly before addressed to Him by them, sufficiently disclosed their pride and envy. The Evangelist tells us how the disciples of John came to Him saying: Why do we and the Pharisees fast often, but Thy disciples do not fast? (Matt 9:14). At another time the same disciples complained to John and said to him: Rabbi, He that was with thee beyond the Jordan, to Whom thou gavest testimony, behold He baptizeth, and all men come to Him. (John 3:26). It was as if they said: We are a small number and almost forsaken, for the multitude are with Jesus Christ, and they follow Him.
- II. St. John does not say to our Lord: Art Thou He that is come? But he asks: Art Thou He that art to come? As if to say : Let me know whether, after announcing Thy coming into this world, I shall not also announce Thy coming into Limbo, whither I shall soon be going? For is it right and just that the Son of God should die? And is it not Thy own wish to send someone to the just in Limbo and announce to them the mystery of Thy advent? Note: The

limbo being spoken of here is the limbus patrum, the Limbo of the Fathers. At the end of this sermon I've appended an excerpt from the Catholic Encyclopedia on this subject.

- III. And Jesus answered the inquiring disciples and said to them: Go and relate to John what you have heard and seen. The blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead rise again. John had through his disciples asked this question of Jesus : Art Thou He that art to come, or look we for another? Yet, instead of answering this question, instead of removing with one word whatsoever had scandalized them, Jesus mentioned His miracles and said to them: Go and relate to John the miracles you have seen; speak of the blind who now see, of the lame who now walk, and of all other miraculous cures you have witnessed. And tell him another fact, no less astonishing, that the poor have the Gospel preached to them. Under the name of poor our Saviour meant both the poor in spirit and the poor deprived of the goods of this world; for there will not be any difference between rich and poor, nobleman and serf, when the Gospel is preached to them. This also shows how just and wise and true the Divine Teacher is, Who, when working for the salvation of their souls, considers them all equal. And the words which He added, Blessed is he that shall not be scandalized in Me, contain a reproof addressed to the disciples of John, as we shall see later on.
- IV. And when these messengers went their way, Jesus began to say to the multitudes, concerning John: What went ye out into the desert to see? A reed shaken with, the wind? But what went ye out to see? A man clothed in soft garments? Behold they that are clothed in soft garments are in the houses of kings. Had our Lord condemned St. John by these words, Blessed is he that is not scandalized in Me, as many pretend, why does He overwhelm him with praises? Indeed, Jesus praised John the Baptist, because the multitude did not understand the meaning of the disciples question, and thought that even John was still in doubt as to whether Jesus really were the Messiah, though he had already pointed Him out as the true Lamb of God. In order, therefore, to give the multitude to understand that John did not send his disciples for the purpose of clearing up his doubt, but to have them instructed, our Lord said: What went ye out into the desert to see? Was it to see a man who like a reed is shaken with every wind; an inconstant man who is still in doubt about the mission of Him Whom he had already announced? Do you think he envies Me, and that by his preaching he seeks only his own honour and glory and even personal interest? And how could riches and dainty dishes delight one who makes his food of locusts and wild honey? Would soft garments be more useful to him, since he is clothed with camel's hair and a leathern girdle about his loins? Such food and such garments are the appanage of those who look for no other dwelling than a prison; for this will be the abode of them that preach the truth. Flatterers and self-interested people, that is, those who are eager in the pursuit of money and of luxurious living, you find them and their desires in the houses of kings. All this clearly shows that those who lead a severe and penitential life, and who announce the truth in all its purity, without deceit and flattery, must remain away from royal courts and from the palaces of sensual people.

V. The testimony which Truth Itself gave to John the Baptist, saying that he was more than a prophet, exalted him above all other prophets, because, whilst other prophets had, many hundreds of years before, announced again and again the coming of Jesus, John had pointed Him out as already come. Moreover, he was distinguished above all other prophets by the privilege accorded to him of baptizing Jesus in the waters of the Jordan. And in order to point out to all the special dignity of John, our Lord added: This is he of whom it is written: Behold, I send My angel before thy face, who shall prepare the way before thee (Mark 3:2). Not that John possessed the angelic nature, but that, announcing to us the coming of the Saviour, he performed one of the duties of the celestial messengers.