

Commentary on the Gospel: A Time of Dynamic Waiting

Gospel for the 3rd Sunday in Advent (Year C), and commentary.

Gospel (*Lk 3:10-18*)

And the multitudes asked him, “What then shall we do?” And he answered them, “He who has two coats, let him share with him who has none; and he who has food, let him do likewise.”

Tax collectors also came to be baptized, and said to him, “Teacher, what shall we do?” And he said to

them, "Collect no more than is appointed you."

Soldiers also asked him, "And we, what shall we do?" And he said to them, "Rob no one by violence or by false accusation, and be content with your wages."

As the people were in expectation, and all men questioned in their hearts concerning John, whether perhaps he were the Christ, John answered them all, "I baptize you with water; but he who is mightier than I is coming, the thong of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie; he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor, and to gather the wheat into his granary, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."

So, with many other exhortations, he preached good news to the people.

Commentary

After recounting the events in Jesus' childhood, Luke's Gospel turns to the mission of John the Baptist. This man of God, viewed as the last of the prophets, the connecting point between the Old and New Testaments, traveled through the region of the Jordan preaching and baptizing.

So great was his wisdom that crowds of people approached him to ask what they should do, what life they should lead, in order truly to convert. Those who came to John knew that baptism was not only a symbol but the sign of the beginning of a new life. In the history of salvation, water always marks a change, as in the universal flood that cleansed the world of sinful humanity, or the crossing of the Red Sea that opened

the path of freedom to the People of Israel.

John has advice for everyone: publicans, soldiers, and the crowds of ordinary people. He teaches each one a path of conversion that leads to being concerned about others, serving society, practicing justice, and fleeing from gossip.

Advent is for all Christians a path of conversion expressed in acts of penance and prayer, and requires a change of life. We too can ask our Lord what he wants from each one of us: “what shall we do?” Our deeds have important consequences, as the Baptist tells us in the conclusion of the passage we have just read. The Lord holds “his winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor, and to gather the wheat into his granary, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.” As the Messiah’s public mission is about to

begin, the Precursor reminds us of the serious effects of sin in our lives, the seriousness of judgment, and he calls us to conversion.

The “people were in expectation,” the Gospel tells us. We are in a time of waiting, both in Advent and in our entire life here on earth. We are waiting for the Saviour. We are waiting for the beginning of the Kingdom of God and the definitive coming of Jesus. But our waiting cannot be passive; it needs to be a dynamic attitude that requires a continuous and renewed conversion.

This is the Church’s invitation during these final days of waiting: “stand firm in the Lord, my beloved ... The Lord is at hand” (*Phil* 4:1.5).

Giovanni Vassallo //

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