

THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT; Cycle – A; Dec.11th 2022.
Isaiah 35: 1-6, 10; James 5: 7-10; Matthew 11: 2-11

Dear Sisters & Brothers,

Last Sunday we heard the powerful Messianic testimony of John the Baptist as how the Messiah would appear with vindication. As John envisioned, the Messiah would come with winnowing fan in his hands to gather his wheat and burn the chaff in the unquenchable fire and he would have the ax in his hand to cut down all the trees which would not bear fruit. When the Jews heard this message they were excited and happy; for they were expecting a powerful Messiah of that description. They believed that the purpose of the coming of the Messiah would be to re-establish the Davidic kingdom by overthrowing the Roman rule from Palestine. Indeed, he would be a liberator. And also, according to Malachi nobody would come to know even, when and where from the Messiah would appear; but he would appear in the Temple and begin his purification task. Prophet Malachi says in 3: 1b-2, **“And suddenly there will come to the Temple the Lord whom you seek, and the messenger of the covenant whom you desire. But who will endure the day of his coming? And who can stand when he appears?”** Naturally John who knew about this prophecy believed to have such fire and brimstone in the Messianic ministry. Finally when Jesus appeared in the scene many were disappointed. The Pharisees could not believe that the simple carpenter from Nazareth could be the Messiah. They commented once, **“But we know where he is from. When the Messiah comes, no one will know where he is from.” (John 7: 34).**

The context of today’s gospel is the tragic end of John’s mission and he was cast into prison by Herod Antipas; for John questioned his illegal marriage with his sister-in-law. Perhaps, John thought that the Messiah would come with vindication to liberate him. But nothing happened and thus it seems that he started doubting whether Jesus would be the Messiah at all. He was wondering, what happened to the winnowing fan and the ax in Jesus’ hands? **Contrary to the prediction of John, instead of cutting down the sinners Jesus welcomed them and even dined with them.** It is certain that Jesus was not the type of Messiah John expected and the Jews either. That is why, John sent his disciples to Jesus with a genuine question, **Are you the one who is to come, or should we wait for another?”**

Perhaps Isaiah, as we heard in today’s first reading, recognized the nature of the Messianic mission. Indeed, he would come as **a liberator**, not as a

political liberator but as *a spiritual and physical liberator; a liberator who will free people from the bondage of sins*. He would come to open the eyes of the blind; clear the ears of the deaf, make the mute speak; make the lame walk; heal the lepers and exactly Jesus was doing the same. In answer to the question of John's disciples, instead of giving his identity directly, Jesus simply repeats the prophecy of Isaiah. Jesus then asks John's disciples to go and inform him what they have seen and heard. Jesus knew that John would not be that happy with his explanation. So he makes an important statement, **“And blessed is the one who takes no offense at me.”** We don't know for sure whether John was offended by the life style of Jesus or not.

Currently no nation may be under the dominion or rule of another nation. The word 'slavery' in the strict sense has disappeared from the minds of people. Today in most of the countries people enjoy freedom in every area of life; freedom of religion, freedom of speech, freedom of writing, freedom of life style, freedom of choice and so on. **But nobody realizes the truth that the modern world as a whole is in the worst slavery of sin and the influence of evil.** In John's gospel 8:34, Jesus says, **“Amen, amen I say to you, everyone who commits sin is a slave of sin.”** In that case none of us can claim that we are fully free. The present generation needs a total liberation from the bondage of sin. **Today many are blind not physically but blind towards the injustice committed to the innocent and the suffering of the poor; blind to see the hands of God in their lives and presence of God in others; they are deaf to hear the voice of God and Word of God; they are lame for lack of the support from God; they are poor for lack of the love of God in them and they are dead for God has already died in their hearts and families.** These are the people who need liberation and only Jesus Christ can give that. We need to make an examination of conscience and see whether you and I need liberation. We have a liberator standing with us, who does not have a winnowing fan or ax; he didn't come to cut down the trees that do not bear fruit, rather **his hands are extended to us to welcome and accept us as we are and free us from the bondage of sin and ailments.** Remember, the ultimate solution of every problem is Jesus Christ, period. But now and then we all doubt as John did, will he be our liberator? But we should be patient as St. James exhorts his community in today's second reading. We have to wait for the time of the Lord. In other words, we should not dictate God what and how he should do. Jesus says, **“And blessed is the one who does not take offense at me.”**