

## Advent 3

I take as my text today from the 11th Chapter of St. Matthew's Gospel:

....Go and shew John again those things which ye do  
hear and see...

“Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be always acceptable in thy sight O' Lord my Strength and my Redeemer.”

Today's Gospel passage from St. Matthew focuses on Jesus as another kind of Messiah. By that, Jesus represents a total departure from the Old Testament expectation.

Knowing John's background, we are able to discern the tension that might be developing in his disciples for they, like their master, were expecting something very much different from what they were seeing in Jesus.

While part of that tension might be attributed to the manner in which Jesus and His disciples lived daily, in that they did not fast as did John and his disciples, who led quite an austere lifestyle, there was just something about His demeanor and sense of purpose.

Jesus was indeed different and the lowly estate of His background was not without notice among the Jews who were offended at His parentage, His lack of formal education, and His general up-bringing. He was being judged on outward appearances, as Jesus addressed in these words:

And blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in  
me.

What treasures might be found in a plain box while less may be revealed when a beautifully wrapped package is opened. Indeed, what beauty may be found in those whose external appearance is less than pleasing.

Quite to the point in the Gospel passage here is that it presents a contrast between the expectation of a Messiah of might and vengeance, as envisioned by John the Baptist, and that of a Messiah of Love, as was the reality of Jesus Christ.

Based on the prophets of old and as preached by John the Baptist, the vision of the Messiah was an earthly king who would liberate Israel from its earthly conditions.

But, that was not the kind of Messiah that God had planned. Jesus represented something very much different from what the Jewish nation expected and could accept as Messiah.

In a nut shell, the expectation of the Jewish people at that time could not be met by Jesus Christ. He just wasn't their kind of Messiah. He was not going to ride at the head of a mighty army to drive the Romans from the land of Israel. He was not going to establish an earthly kingship and rule from an earthly throne.

That He could be, had the power and authority to be, the mighty deliverer of Israel from Roman bondage, a powerful earthly king, was evident from what He was accomplishing:

....the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them.

In answer to the question, not that John's faith was failing him but perhaps more out of impatience as he sat in prison, Jesus offered proof that he was the Messiah. Yes, but not as you have imagined or expected is what Jesus was telling John's disciples, the message He told them to deliver to John in prison.

What separated John in his expectation of the Messiah from the reality of Jesus as the true Messiah was the Cross.

Before the Cross there was one expectation; after the Cross there was another.

Because he could not see the Cross, John only grasped half the truth; his gospel was that of divine holiness with divine destruction. The true gospel of Jesus Christ was that of divine holiness with divine love.

With John came the dawn of the New Covenant; but, alas, he was not to witness that moment on the Cross when Jesus redeemed humankind by paying the price of our redemption. The debt that we had run up for our transgressions was infinite, something we could of ourselves never pay. But Jesus Christ, who had taken on our nature, and lived a perfect and undefiled life, could offer to make satisfaction for us to God.

As our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ paid the debt owed to God but that did not mean there were no consequences for our sins. We still would be judged accordingly; yet, without Jesus Christ being the Satisfaction for the sins of the whole of creation, we could not approach a final judgment in which we would be given our final disposition and our eternal lot meted out.

From the very beginning, it was God's desire that provision be made for His creation to be re-united to Him. That provision was fulfilled in His Son. And clearly, all that Jesus did in His earthly ministry was an expression of God's love for us, fulfilled on the Cross when our sins were nailed with our Saviour to the wood.

From the dawn of creation, there has been an expectation, a waiting for something great and wonderful. Through God's Chosen People, the process of fulfillment began, the preparation being made, not just for the first Advent but also for the second and final Advent.

Then, in a moment of time, through a joyous and profound event, God entered the world in the Person of Jesus Christ and embraced His creation. He poured forth His love as He took upon Himself the burden of our sins in the perfect union of God and man. In taking human nature upon Himself, He was able to experience all that we as human beings experience, all the emotions and feelings, both physical and spiritual.

In this perfect uniting of the Divine and the human, Jesus Christ was able to accomplish what we could never in all of eternity do: He was able to make satisfaction for our sins, the sins of the whole world so that we may, in the final Judgment, stand before Him and receive our due.

One of the theologians of the 11<sup>th</sup> century, St. Anselm, Archbishop of Canterbury, gave much thought to the whole concept of the Atonement and how our infinite debt to God could be satisfied and, though his philosophy would not be accepted entirely, he offered much in the way of understanding the redemptive process. One thing he did leave us was this prayer, most appropriate for Advent:

My God, I pray that I may so know you and love you that I may rejoice in you. And if I may not do so fully in this life let me go steadily onto the day when I come to that fullness ...Let me receive That which you promised through your truth, that my joy may be full.

Our life as a Christian is a journey with a purpose, with a goal, and it is not without its obstacles, its difficulties and diversions. And though it may not always be the straight path we would hope for, nevertheless, if we always keep before us and in us the Lord Jesus Christ, we will ultimately reach that goal.

Knowing the joy and wonder of the First Coming, when God sent His Son to deliver us from the bondage of sin, we can have a joyful, though solemn, expectation for the Second Coming of our Lord, knowing that satisfaction for our sins has been made, that infinite debt has been paid, knowing that we will be judged fairly and lovingly when we finally stand before Him.