

The 3rd Sunday of Advent — December 15, 2019

Happy Gaudete Sunday ! It is a special Sunday a Sunday of Joyfulness. Joy in the closeness of celebrating once again **The Birth of the Savior in our world**. He is the only Saviorthere is no other we cannot save ourselves no matter how hard we try, or no matter how good we are ! Salvation comes through Him alone,Faith in Him and choosing to have a relationship with Him. So we are here to 'Rejoice' and celebrate His presence and to allow ourselves to be drawn into 'Communion' in Him. Is this why you are here ? Are you full of expectation that He will speak to you during this Eucharistthrough His word or through the actions of this Eucharist? God chooses many different ways to speak to us in the Eucharistic Meal ! Why would He not speak to you when you place yourself in His Presence ? So I invite you to rejoice today and be attentive to His presence

As I reflected on these Readings during the course of the week, and all of the hopes and invitations to experience new life, new ways, new approaches to things, I thought about this question:

"If you or I could change the world to make it better, what one thing would you do to change it ?"

I invite you to think about that as we approach the Christmas celebrationwhat would you do ? One thing only would you change something about yourself ? Or about the plight of others ?

I thought of that great couplet :

**"Two men looked out from prison bars,
One saw mud, the other saw stars."**

It is, I guess, a commentary about attitude; seeing the glass half-full or half-empty with the implication that we should be 'the star gazer,' the drinker of life's half-full glass. Well, it sounds good enough believable enough !

But, today with the words of Matthew's Gospel ringing in our ears, let us consider the other side. We might reflect on the mud-gazer, the drinker of life's half-empty glass. Here is John the Baptist, stuck in his prison cell is he a mud-gazer ? Last week, we saw him in a glorious fashion, dressed in camel-hair, a unique diet, and proclaiming a Baptism of Repentance for the Forgiveness of sins, because the Savior is coming ! All sorts of people were coming out to hear him, each asking what must we do :

"The people were full of anticipation, wondering in their hearts whether John might be the Messiah"

Now, here is John the Baptist in prison. It is one thing to be righteous and brave and popular when you're free and in charge, and people are flocking to you and hanging on your every word. But, it is quite a different matter to be in a filthy jail cell, looking through prison bars, awaiting execution. No crowds, no press, no affirmations, no

Messiah near by to point to. Just mud ! And, plenty of time to thinkand, with thinking comes doubt. John had been very clear about his mission to announce the presence of the Messiah.

Now there may be a little 'crisis of faith' ! Where's the Messiah....when you need Him ? Where is the peaceable kingdom that was promised ? Where is the blooming desert ? Where is the Reconciliation ? The Tolerance ? The Brotherhood ? Where is the promised Relief ?

Was it all some great Illusion? Did I back the wrong horse ? Was he the one to come ? So what's it like to be in prison, and facing all of those questions and anxiety ? One might easily say I have never been in prison so I wouldn't know !!!!! Not so fast we are all in prison a self-made prison ! What does yours look like ?

Here is what Pablo d'Ors says he is an amazing spiritual author, priest, and leader. In 2014, he founded the "Amigos del Desierto" "Friends of the Desert." His aim was to develop the practice of Meditation ! His belief was that issues in the lives of so many people had gone way out of control because of the absence of Meditation ! Without Meditationwithout the presence of genuine silence in our liveswe will never really know ourselves or others and we will not know Him whom we claim as Lord and Savior ! He likens the absence of meditation in one's life to an experience of sleep-walking through life. Listen to what he says :

" Waking up is discovering that we are in jail. But waking up is also discovering that this jail has no bars and that, strictly speaking, it is not properly a jail. We begin to ask ourselves why have I lived locked in a jail with no bars ? And we go to it's door. And we walk out. Meditating is that moment that we exit. We discover that the door has never been closed, that it is we who have closed it with a double turn of the key. That door is not a door— we invented it."

So perhaps we are much more like John the Baptist than we are willing to face or admit ! From our prison, we send out messengers asking, "Are you the Christ or should we look for another ?" Many have looked for another !

Jesus' answer in today's Gospel may be sensing John's cynicism, and perhaps ours, also. It is of the utmost importance. He responds sympathetically Look, I know where you are coming from, but you are looking for answers in all the wrong places. Really, I am not what you expected, what people wanted, I am not a Tabloid Messiah at CNN, or a celebrity survivor, or a powerful judge. I have not come for conquest or domination. You won't find me in the halls of power. Remember, I was born in a stable ! Think about it ? And look and see the good things you see !

"the blind regain their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have the good news proclaimed to them. And Blessed is the one who takes no offense at me."

—Fr. Gerry Hurley