

Third Sunday of Advent

December 13, 2020

Year B RCL

Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11; Psalm 126; John 1:6-8,19-28

“He came as a witness to testify to the light.”

By: The Rev. Fr. Fabian Villalobos

The Third Sunday of Advent offers for our reflection, the testimony of John the Baptist and how Jews in the gospel inquire about his identity. John's humble recognition of his role on being the precursor of the Messiah shows to us a clear example of Christian maturity and service.

“When the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, “Who are you?” He confessed and did not deny it, but confessed, “I am not the Messiah.” This is the first series of answers where John in an explicit and distinct way declares that he is not the person that the people were waiting for. Two times the religious leaders pressed on him with the same question: “Who are you?” and lastly, they asked “What do you say about yourself?”

John's three answers in today's gospel are all part of his testimony about Jesus. John is neither the light, the messiah, nor a prophet. Instead, he describes his

life and ministry as the “the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way of the Lord’”. His voice calls people to repentance and change. John’s capacity to show and give testimony of the messiah is truly an illustration of what is Christian service and ministry.

We can say that John empties himself and disregards any human recognition to allow for all glory and praise to Jesus. John knows very well his place to the point of declaring that he is unworthy to untie the thong of Jesus’ sandals. For this reason, John’s testimony was credible, dependable, and trustworthy to the point of creating confusion for those who were thinking that he was the messiah.

Often in our society, unfortunately titles, recognition, and holding power seems important and defines the individual’s identity for some people. The testimony of John’s relinquishment and uprightness about himself is a testimony of the truth. I am not the messiah, not Elijah, not the prophet. John is a witness of the light and is not afraid to call himself just “the voice of one crying out in the wilderness.”

The capacity to show the truth and give testimony with deed and words is an illustration of John’s service that goes beyond his own life. John later declares

“he must increase, but I must decrease” (John 3:30), speaking about how Jesus is always who has precedence and first place before anything or anyone else.

The testimony of John continues to be actual, especially when we consider that the only way to allow the truth of God to be present in our lives is when we make room for him. It is impossible to understand or enjoy the truthful presence of Jesus if we do not have the courage to recognize that we are not God. In John’s life, his honesty and humility is enough to give testimony of Jesus’ light.

For some Christians full of themselves and their own temptation of being the messiah is so strong that ministry and service could be confused with self-righteousness and pride. For them and for all, John's disarming testimony continues to be a stimulus to serve selflessly, putting God before one's own ego. John in recognizing his ministry as a voice, shows something that is invisible and transient, but effective and necessary.

Today, we and all believers are sent like John to give testimony of the light and love of God among us. It is important to understand that John gave his testimony in a public and committed way. If we keep Jesus and God on the private spectrum of our own lives, then our Christian testimony is reduced to

the limited experiences we share about God with only those whom we feel comfortable to talk about religion.

John's call to repentance needs to be heard in first person; each one of us as baptize members of the Body of Christ is a living witness of God to the world. John is for the members of the church during this pandemic, a reminder that the light of Jesus overcomes the darkness of the sin of the world. Each one of us following the example of John needs to embrace our own emptiness and recognize who we are, and who we are not, so to allow the light of God to shine through us. Amen.