

# THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Now when John heard in prison  
about the deeds of the  
Christ, he sent word by  
his disciples and said  
to him, "Are you he  
who is to come,  
or shall we look  
for another?"

And Jesus  
answered  
them, "Go  
and tell  
John what  
you hear  
and see:  
the blind  
receive  
their sight  
and the  
lame walk,  
lepers are  
cleansed and  
the deaf hear,  
and the dead  
are raised up,  
and the poor have  
good news preached  
to them. And blessed is he  
who takes no offense at me."

As they went away, Jesus began to speak  
to the crowds concerning John: "What did you go out into the  
wilderness to behold? A reed shaken by the wind? Why then  
did you go out? To see a man clothed in soft raiment? Behold,  
those who wear soft raiment are in kings' houses. Why then did  
you go out? To see a prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than  
a prophet. This is he of whom it is written, 'Behold, I send my  
messenger before thy face, who shall prepare thy way before  
thee.' Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has  
risen no one greater than John the Baptist; yet he who is least  
in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

(Mt 11:2-11)

In Madrid in August 2011, when World Youth Day was being held in that city, two young friends of mine met one of the locals who was quite sad about the festivities because, he said, "It seems like a party is going on and I am not part of it." How often do you hear the Catholic Church spoken of as a party?! Hooray! Let's go!! A few weeks ago I began a homily at a Youth 2000 retreat by asking the young Catholics whether they enjoyed being Catholic. It was heartening to see some of them look at their friends and nod the head. In this Gospel John the Baptist, in prison, asks if Jesus is "the one to come" and Jesus tells the messengers to look around at the evidence:

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

Rock 'n' Roll! The Church is a spiritual feast in which we have laid out in front of us all the gifts of God, gifts for the soul in abundance. St Augustine speaks of the words of the psalm "All the trees of the wood shall sing for joy at the presence of the Lord, for he comes." He says, "He came first, and afterwards he will come to judge the earth. Those who believed his first coming he will find singing for joy that he comes."

Jesus turns around to the crowds and asks them about John. "When you went out into the wilderness to see John, what did you see?" Why ask that? Jesus is asking them why they went out. Were they impressed by what they saw? Or was it for mere curiosity? If Jesus asks, "Who did you go out to see?" and they shrug their shoulders, they might as well be looking for a reed swaying in the wind – John was unbending! – or a man all dressed up. Like the crowds were merely curious when Jesus died on the cross but the Good Thief saw that there was more going on. When we go to meet the Lord, when we go to Mass, what do we expect to see there? Are we merely curious or are we impressed and deeply involved? Pope Benedict XVI wanted the Church to be made of "communities that are more convinced." No swaying reeds there as, in Advent, we wait for the Lord to come and save us. Let the party begin!

## QUESTIONS

- 1) If the psalm promises that the trees will clap their hands and the hills ring out their joy when the Lord comes, do you ever feel that you enjoy being a Catholic?
- 2) Make a short list of the most important advantages to you of believing in Christ. In other words, to re-use Jesus' lines about John the Baptist, when you go to Mass, who do you go to see?
- 3) Have you ever heard of a miracle like the ones Jesus speaks of in this Gospel?

## PROJECT

Jesus says here that among the signs that show who he is, "the poor have the good news preached to them." Is that the case in your parish or among your circle of friends? What word or deed could you slip in to your conversation or your daily schedule to preach the word of God to someone who needs it, even just once?

