

Third Sunday of Advent

By: Fr. John A. Sistare

Expectations! Tis the season for expectations! Preconceived ideas & notions! No doubt this week before Christmas, the Christmas tree is filling up underneath with gifts! Many of us try to guess what is inside these gifts! Expectations of what we think is inside or not inside these gifts! We all have our favorite ways to figure out what is inside these gifts. Some of us merely look at the size of them. Usually we judge bigger ones to be something special but that's not always the case. Then of course there is the weight test. How heavy is a certain gift? Our eyes open wide for those! Finally, we have my favorite, the *shake it test*. That tells you right away if it's clothes or not! Expectations! Today, we need to look at expectations, not so much of material gifts but of the greatest gift, Jesus Christ. We have that great gift present every time we come to Mass, in the Blessed sacrament of the Eucharist.

In the Gospel, we hear of Expectations! Many had expectations of who they thought the messenger of the Christ would be. John the Baptist was expected to be a certain way. However, I assure you, he did not fit the bill of the messenger or precursor the people expected. That is why Jesus asks the people, "*What did you go out to the desert to see?*" What were you expecting my messenger to be like? He certainly would have not been in a fashion show anytime soon, with his camel hair garment. John wasn't interested in impressing others. John came to prepare the way for Jesus and call people to repentance. One of the main targets of this message was King Herod. King Herod was living with his brother's wife. That means, Herod was in adultery and John called him to task for that action. John was not what the people expected. Furthermore, if they couldn't accept the voice, then don't think they would accept the Word, Jesus Christ!

Many had expectations of what the Messiah would be like. That is why John tells his disciples to ask Jesus if he is the long awaited Messiah, the Son of God. Some early Church Fathers speculate as to why John had them ask Jesus this question. They said it wasn't that John didn't know who Jesus was, because remember, he pointed out Jesus as the Lamb of God. Instead, these early Fathers speculate that John was actually detaching himself from his disciples so they would follow Jesus. John would decrease as Jesus would increase. Humility!!! Jesus tells them to go to John and tell them what they have seen. The blind see, the deaf hear, the lame walk, the dead are raised to life! Nonetheless, they all had expectations of what the Christ would be like.

Today, let's look at the expectations we can sometimes put on Jesus. Many have preconceived ideas and notions of what Jesus should be like. Let's look at some expectations people have made Jesus into these days. These are only some, there are many more I'm sure all of you could creatively come up with as well.

The first is what I call the **BandAid Jesus!** A BandAid covers a wound. It patches up a cut or scrape. Jesus certainly healed people and performed miracles. However, Jesus is not primarily a healer! He is not first and foremost a miracle worker. Many people make Jesus into just that. They only come to him when they need to be healed or someone else needs to be cured. That is not who Jesus is

primarily. In fact, if that is the way we see Jesus, we may be disappointed in the end. If we are not healed, we then consequently may question God as to why it didn't happen. We don't know God's will!

Then there is the **PC Jesus**. This is the Jesus of the couch and not the Cross. This is the Jesus who can be spoken of only when he is popular. A perfect example of this was Sept 11th. Many people, thanks be to God, came to God for answers. However, we don't come to Jesus only when he is popular. We need Jesus each and everyday! PC Jesus is the Jesus that doesn't challenge or rock the boat. We can stay comfortable in our sin, no matter how serious they may be.

Now, the third is my own weakness. I am often tempted to take this type of Jesus. I call it the **Terminator Jesus**. You all know that the Terminator was a movie in which Arnold Swatznegger wiped out everyone and created mass destruction. How tempting it is to want a Jesus who would do just that with our enemies. *Jesus, wipe out all the big sinners!* Wipe out all our enemies so we can be at peace! However, Jesus is a God of compassion and forgiveness. He is a God of mercy and thus no matter how tempting it may be to want wrath and vengeance, that's not what Jesus is about!

Ok, final expectation. This one requires a little knowledge of an Italian expression: "**Basta Così**" **Jesus**. This expression, *basta cosi*, means, *that's enough*. For example, in Italy a waiter may ask if you want more pasta, you could say, *basta cosi, that's enough!* Perhaps someone is talking too much, you would say, *basta cosi, enough!* Many deal with Jesus this way. That's enough. *Basta Così Jesus!* This can take on two extreme views of Jesus. The first is lax view. I call this the **seasonal Jesus**. We only take Jesus in our life at Christmas and Easter. This is very popular at this time of the year, Jesus comes out with the decorations and when we are done, he goes back on the shelf. Jesus is for every moment of our lives, not just Christmas or Easter seasons! The other extreme is the **'woe is me' Jesus**. My sins are too big for Jesus. I am too big a sinner for him. That is dangerous thinking, because one drop of the blood of Christ can forgive the biggest and ugliest of sins! One drop! No sin is too big for Jesus. If there is anyone here today and is struggling with a sin, what greater gift to give Jesus this Christmas, than your very soul washed clean in the sacrament of confession.

OK, would the real Jesus stand up! Who is Jesus first and foremost? **Jesus is a Savior!** Jesus means God saves! Jesus came to save us from our sin. All we are left to ask is, from what? No matter who we are, we all have sins. Perhaps they are small or maybe they are bigger ones! Nonetheless, Jesus came to wash those sins away. Finally, why did this Savior come? Jesus came as a baby only to grow up and die on a Cross and then Rise from the dead, for one reason. Jesus came to save us from sin so we may have life eternal. May the remaining week or so that we have left in Advent, be a time in which we will see Jesus as our savior. May we expect a savior this Christmas and keep our eyes fixed on eternal life prepared for each of us.

READINGS OF THE WEEK

Isaiah 35:1-10

James 5:7-10

Matthew 11:2-11

December 15, 2013

靈 修 生 活

將 臨 期 的 使 命

張 春 申 神 父

耶穌基督，人類的救主果然已經來到過了世間；而且復活升天之後，還是天天臨在人間，直到世界末日。為此，人類期待救主來臨的第一個將臨期已經結束。我們處在第二個將臨期，等待人子光榮來臨。不過為許許多多尚未認識基督，還沒有體驗到基督救恩的人而論，他們似乎依舊處在第一個將臨期中。也許有人會問：我們可以這樣說嗎？那些人如果絲毫沒有渴望之心，怎能說處在將臨期中呢？

其實，按照聖奧斯定的思想：人是天主所做的；人心如果得不到天主的救恩，常是動盪不安。既然天主的救恩是在基督內，賜給了人類，所以原則上我們可以說人人都渴望基督的救恩；那些尚未認識基督的、不清楚意識到基督救恩的人，亦在內心深處，模糊地渴望基督來臨到他們生命中。很多時候，他們所需要的，便是教會給他們有效地說明，耶穌便是他們內心所渴望的救恩之來源；唯有祂的訊息才能滿足人心基本的渴望。今天將臨期第三主日的福音，有助教會反省怎樣向那些尚在隱隱地渴望基督的人傳道。

若翰為耶穌授洗之後，按照瑪竇福音的記載便與祂分手。看來他對耶穌默西亞身份尚未完全清楚肯定，於是今天福音中說當他在獄中的時候，派遣自己的門徒去詢問耶穌。耶穌在這機會上，便根據以色列的信仰、先知書的預言，作證祂自己。自瞎子看見、跛子行走等等標記，若翰不難認清耶穌是誰。其實我們當代教會，面對那些似乎尚在第一將臨期的人，繼續在做相同於耶穌的工作，使人肯定心中所渴望的真實救主是誰。耶穌基督自己有效地在祂的時代中，應用舊約的材料，作證自己的身份，可是在現時代，我們四週的人群並沒有以色列人的聖經背景。因此教會必須尋找另一種新的作證方法，肯定耶穌基督。至少教宗保祿六世的「在新世界傳福音」勸諭，特別強調教會的「生活作證」。教友在生活中的致力於高尚及美好的事，單純地肯定超越現世的價值；對眼見不到及人不敢想像之事之希望，導致別人對基督之追問、認識與接受；這便是當代教會向人類作證基督救恩的方式。如同若翰在耶穌的答覆中，知道默西亞已經來臨，那些渴望天主救恩的現代人，在教會的作證生活中承認自己內心尋找的真是耶穌基督。總之，教會必須在現時代，以自己的生活，向那些似乎尚在第一將臨期的人作證救主已經來臨。

不過今天福音中，對於曾為自己付洗的若翰，耶穌還向群眾極力誇獎了一番；他在荒野中以正直的為人態度，以清貧克苦的先知性生活方式，完成了宣講悔改、準備主的道路的使命。其實在這將臨期中，教會在若翰的使命中，也應學習另一重要真理。它果然如同上面所說的應當以生活來作證基督的來臨，但是另一方面，必須同時呼籲重視道德生活。真的，除非人悔改；捨棄沉溺於物慾、貪圖世樂的墮落生活，開始嚴肅地按照良心而行動，即使他面對教會的作證，也會視而不見，聽而不聞的。為此，若翰的工作，今天的教會同樣應當繼續下去，準備還未體驗基督救恩來臨的人。

所以，基督雖然已經來臨，教會仍舊負擔著不少將臨期中應當完成的責任，為那些心靈中救主尚未來臨的人，或者宣講悔改，或者作證基督的救恩。

摘自「妙音送長風」

本 週 讀 經

二 零 一 三 年 十 二 月 十 五 日

依 35:1-10; 雅 5:7-10; 瑪 11:2-11