



# ST. MATTHEW — PARISH —

## Advent 2020 Week 3

### ► 3rd Sunday of Advent: GOSPEL

**John 1:6–8, 19–28** John was not the light but came to testify to the light.

A man named John was sent from God.  
He came for testimony, to testify to the light,  
so that all might believe through him.  
He was not the light,  
but came to testify to the light.  
And this is the testimony of John.  
When the Jews from Jerusalem  
sent priests and Levites to him to ask him,  
“Who are you?”  
he admitted and did not deny it, but admitted,  
“I am not the Christ.”  
So they asked him, “What are you then? Are you Elijah?”  
And he said, “I am not.”  
“Are you the Prophet?”  
He answered, “No.”  
So they said to him,  
“Who are you, so we can give an answer to those who sent us?  
What do you have to say for yourself?”  
He said: “I am the voice of one crying out in the desert,  
‘Make straight the way of the Lord,’  
as Isaiah the prophet said.”  
Some Pharisees were also sent. They asked him,  
“Why then do you baptize if you are not the Christ or Elijah or the Prophet?”  
John answered them,  
“I baptize with water; but there is one among you  
whom you do not recognize, the one who is coming after me,  
whose sandal strap I am not worthy to untie.”  
This happened in Bethany across the Jordan,  
where John was baptizing.

## ► 3rd Sunday of Advent REFLECTION:

### A man named John was sent from God.

The evangelist gives John top credentials. John is from God, so his words are a message from God. At the same time, John belongs to God, not to himself. The messenger doesn't get to have priorities of his own. John puzzles us. What he does with his life is clearly a sacrifice; yet he **wouldn't trade it** for all the comfort and prosperity in the world. [Scale]

### He was not the light but came to testify to the light.

The thing that John's life is all about does not belong to him. Whatever it is that we want most in life, it's never something we can give ourselves. **We must seek it, act for it, and prepare to receive it as a gift.** John has chosen the Lord, the light. While his life is not his own (and is thus full of sacrifice) and others hostile to the light may even kill him, they **cannot take away** the thing his life is about.

### Priests and Levites...and Pharisees were sent...

Everybody is a messenger. We all speak on behalf of larger groups and broader ideas. A kid who is torn between spending time with friends or with family will make a statement about friendship and family by the balance struck. We testify in our every action and expression. We may be largely unaware of all that we are saying. We need leisure time to examine ourselves, and leisure too to talk it over with friends and family. Socrates said that the unexamined life is not worth living. John the Baptist urges us to examine, be converted, and see how good life can get.

### Who are you?

John's **negative** answers are crystal clear. "I am not the Christ, not Elijah, not the Prophet." In its own way, "no" is just as essential a word as "love." (Recall in the Trinity: loves and is not.) We generally find that the more we love, the more we end up saying "no." I know a family with eight sons. When each boy gets home, he puts his cell phone on its charger. The phone stays there, unanswered, as long as he is home. The family statement is, "While we are here together, we are here for each other. The world can call our hardline or wait."

Soon we will be singing "Joy to the World." Paradoxically, the meaning would be **unchanged** if the song was "No to the World." **"Joy" and "No"** are two sides of the same ginger bread cookie.

### What are you?

John's **positive** answer is a riddle: "A voice crying out in the desert..." The only way John can tell the messengers about himself is by talking about the One Who is coming. John has nothing to say for himself, only for the Lord. The power to stop talking about oneself—if I had more of that power, I'd be so good at my job! Of all the things in the world that could use a mute button, number one (thumbs pointing to myself) is first. My brother Brendan agrees.

### Make straight the way of the Lord.

The present world insists that there is never any "right" way, nothing to get "right" with. Relativism is the notion that everyone has to invent their own reality: everyone has an opinion, and all opinions are equally true. A lunar landing is **both** an important achievement **and** a hoax. Relativism says that we each have to invent and travel our road alone, since there is no road for us to discover and share. But on the road to Bethlehem (and later, to Emmaus) we may meet and make friends.

### I'm not worthy to untie His shoes.

Some people cannot tie or untie their shoes. Helping them is not humiliating, it's sweet. Some people need help to tie their shoes but can untie them. We encourage them. If someone quite capable demands, "Untie my shoe," we might tell them to go suck on an icicle. Or we might tell them to take a clue from John the Baptist: your life is not about you.

Our Lord cures the sick and raises the dead. He can handle his shoe laces. John is ready to do our Lord's laces for Him anyway, but considers it too great an honor. In saying, "I'm not worthy," John is expressing the humility that fills his depths. John has an unusual **presence of mind**. All day, every day, John knows what he's here for, and it's not himself.

John is a voice, a witness, a messenger. Telling the message costs John everything: his comfort, his home, even his life. Like the Mighty One who is coming, John does not belong to himself. **So what about us?** If our life story is about other people, what's the **title** of the story? If our life is about testifying, what's the good **statement** God sends us to make?

Neither John nor Jesus comes to do his own will but the will of the sender. And so this reflection on the sacrifice and witness of John leads us to consider the sacrifice of Jesus. Our catechesis this week will bow to the **Paschal Mystery**: the Passion, Death, Resurrection and Ascension of our Lord.

## ► 3rd Sunday of Advent CATECHESIS:

### The Paschal Mystery: the Passion, Death, Resurrection and Ascension of our Lord.

Coincidence has no role in the Lord's Passion. God's freedom and human freedom are involved, but chance and circumstance are not. God has a wise and loving plan which we call "Providence." The Lord's Passion happens in fulfillment of the Scriptures and according to God's foreknowledge. If God knew ahead of time, does that somehow make the death of our Lord **God's own fault**? Did God do it to Himself? Heck, no.

#### Time and Eternity

Here's the first moment of time. Where did it come from? God made it. God also made the next moment of time, and the next. In fact, He made them all. How many years ago did God make time? All of them.

Time is a creature, something God made. Time is not a box that God is trapped in. Quite the opposite. Time is a **tool** God made to use and a **toy** He made to play with.

Here's the time line of history. Notice that God is not on the time line. God is totally independent of time. Every moment stands in front of God as a creature before its Creator. God sees all time at once. Sometimes we call this the "Eternal Now." For God, all moments are "now."

#### So what happened?

1--We run away from home. Well, we **try** to. Our first parents sin and quickly hide from God...in the garden He made for us. In effect, we run away from home, make it as far as the front yard, and build a club house there. We hang out a sign that said, "Humans ONLY."

2--God has no need to change His plan. We use (and misuse) the freedom God gave us; and God allows us to. But God reserves the right to use our free choices (including our BAD choices) for His purposes.

In an act even more creative than Creation, the Father loves His Son into our human condition: the Incarnation.

---Our Lord assumes everything about being human, **including the entire mess** resulting from our sin. God sends His Son in the form of a slave, the form of fallen humanity, on account of sin. God "made Him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God."

---Because it is *God* (who holds all creation in His hand) who becomes man, all human beings are united to Him. The existence of the Divine Son in Christ constitutes him as the **Head of all mankind** (CCC#616). This is why the next part effects **everyone**.

3--God the Son Incarnate says, "My fellow humans, sin hurts us. I really think we should let God love us." We, of course, won't put up with that kind of talk. So we promptly kill Him. We're even civilized about it. We trump up some charges, have a trial, and sentence Him to death with all due process.

The Lord loves us throughout His earthly life, even to the end. In the depths of His Passion, He speaks as the **Head of all mankind**. His "me" means "us" when He says "My God, my God, why have you forsaken **me**?" (CCC#603)

[Side note: similarly, the "I" we say in the Creed at Sunday Mass means "**I, the whole receiving and believing Church**, believe in one God..."]

"The Father loves me, because I lay down my life", said the Lord, "(for) I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father" (Jn 10:17; 14:31; CCC#606).

His suffering says to His Father, "See this? I, on behalf of all of us, offer You my love: my eternal Divine love and my God-sized human love. I offer this even to the point of death in reparation for **our** disobedience." Remember, everything Jesus Christ does, He does as both God and man.

This is our definitive **reconciliation** to God. **There is not, never has been, and never will be a single human being for whom Christ did not suffer** (CCC#604).

The sacrifice of Christ is a gift from God the Father himself. Why does the Father hand his Son over to sinners? In order to reconcile us with Himself.

The redeemed condition our Lord merits for us is **better than brand new**. Sin left us unable to love God the way He made us to love Him, but the sacrifice of Jesus now enables us to love God and one another **with a love that is humanly impossible**.

We may run into a *wrong* idea about the Lord's Passion, the idea that our Lord suffered so that we don't have to. To the contrary, Christ calls us all to take up our cross and to share in His. As the **Head** of all humanity, Christ is uniquely able to offer each human being the possibility of being **His partner** in the Paschal Mystery.

### ► 3rd Sunday of Advent CATECHESIS (Cont'd):

#### Once more:

The Father loves His Son into our time, our place, our human nature in the Incarnation. Jesus is united to every human of every time and place. He is the Head of all humanity.

The Son loves the Father back by accepting His mission to redeem us.

Though innocent of sin, the Jesus enters fully into our fallen state.

Jesus accomplishes His mission through the Paschal Mystery: His Passion, Death, Resurrection and Ascension.

#### The Paschal Mystery in 17 Seconds:

God: "I love you."

Us: "No."

God: "I **LOVE** you."

Us: "NO! Die!"

God: "OK."

Us: "Uh...what just happened?"

### ► 3rd **MONDAY** of Advent DISCUSSION:

On **Monday, December 14th at 7:00pm**, Fr. Kevin McCabe will be on Facebook Live hosting our DISCUSSION for the 3rd Week of Advent.

#### That moment I realized that my life is not about me...

- If our life story is about other people, what's the **title** of the story?
- If our life is about testifying, what's the good **statement** God sends us to make?
- John the Baptist stood against Herod for the truth about marriage.  
Why didn't John just leave Herod to the Mighty One Who is coming?

#### That moment I realized that our Lord went to the cross for me on purpose...

- Presumption:** "There are some bad people out there, and Jesus died for them.  
I've never done anything to need the Lord to die for me."
- Despair:** "Other people seem to get a lot of comfort from our Lord's Passion, but it doesn't seem to change me."
- Christ enables us to love God and others with a love which is humanly impossible.**