

SPIRITUALITY

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Isa 61:1 (cited in Luke 4:18)

R/. Alleluia, alleluia.

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to bring glad tidings to the poor.

R/. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel Matt 11:2-11; L7A

When John the Baptist heard in
prison of the works of the
Christ,

he sent his disciples to Jesus
with this question,

“Are you the one who is to come,
or should we look for another?”

Jesus said to them in reply,

“Go and tell John what you hear
and 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.”

As they were going off,

Jesus began to speak to the crowds about
John,

“What did you go out to the desert to see?

A reed swayed by the wind?

Then what did you go out to see?

Someone dressed in fine clothing?

Those who wear fine clothing are in royal
palaces.

Then why did you go out? To see a prophet?

Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet.

This is the one about whom it is written:

*Behold, I am sending my messenger
ahead of you;*

he will prepare your way before you.

Amen, I say to you,

among those born of women

there has been none greater than John

the Baptist;

yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is
greater than he.”

Reflecting on the Gospel

John the Baptist's presence features prominently in the gospel today. Though we are in the midst of Jesus' ministry and John is in prison, he has a question for the would-be Christ: “Are you the one who is to come / or should we look for another?” Though it might be surprising to us, it seems as though Jesus did not fit the expectations of John the Baptist! Two thousand years later, we see these figures through the eyes of faith and so it can be difficult to place ourselves in the context of their day.

John the Baptist had been preaching fiery judgment, imminent wrath. Last week's gospel itself states this message quite plainly. In John's mind, the one to come would baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire. The winnowing fan is in his hand. The chaff will be burned in an unquenchable fire. But then John is arrested and imprisoned, and Jesus begins preaching and doing mighty deeds. There is not the judgment that John expected. Thus, he sends his own disciples from his imprisonment with an astonishing question for Jesus. Had John gotten it wrong? Is Jesus the one? Or is there another?

For his part, Jesus does not respond with a simple “yes” or “no” answer. He responds by sending John's disciples back to him with a report of what they have seen and heard. Jesus reviews some of his deeds in alluding to the prophet Isaias

He then concludes with an ominous beatitude that seems to be addressed to John directly: “Blessed is the one who takes no offense at me.”

In the Gospel of Matthew we do not have a story of John and Jesus as cousins, as Luke would have it. Instead, Matthew tells us something that might be closer to the historical picture. Perhaps John misunderstood Jesus and his mission. Perhaps John even took offense at what Jesus was preaching and what he was doing. Jesus' words and actions were not what John had expected.

Jesus reminds the one who baptized him that among other things, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have the good news preached to them. This is the mission of the Christ sent by God. Though John is greater than any person, the least in the kingdom of God is greater than he. Nowhere does it say how John responded to this beatitude addressed specifically to him. That silence speaks volumes. Jesus' mission is proclaiming this kingdom and creating it. Let us not take offense at his priorities, even if they are not our own. Instead, let us align ourselves with the Christ sent by God, assisting in proclaiming and creating the kingdom in our own day and time.

Living the Paschal Mystery

Expectations can be lofty things and it is disappointing when we see someone fall short or when we ourselves fall short. Then again, how often are we held to expectations beyond our ability or opposed to our own priorities? If and when we fail to meet the expectations of others, especially when we've had no say in those expectations, the fallout may be significant. Not many of us like to be told what we need to do or how we need to do it. So it is incumbent upon us not to lay unrealistic or uninformed expectations on others either.



Today we learn about John's expectations for Jesus, the one he baptized. John was likely offended at Jesus' behavior and preaching because it was not what he had foretold. The disconnect was so great that John wondered if there was someone else who was to come. This is a good reminder for us to temper our expectations of others. We are ultimately responsible for ourselves, not anyone else. We can let God raise up in others the special gifts, talents, and abilities given to them. We would do well to let die any desire to control others through the expectations we might place on them.

Focusing the Gospel

Key words and phrases: "Are you the one who is to come, / or should we look for another?"

To the point: John's disciples approach Jesus with one of the quintessential questions of life: "Is this it?" How are we supposed to know when we have arrived when we don't know the signposts for where we're going? Jesus gives them to us. The kingdom is in our midst when "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." This is the kingdom that Jesus proclaims in word and deed and to which he invites us. As we journey onward toward Christmas, the great feast of the Incarnation, let us rededicate ourselves to incarnating the life of Jesus and the kingdom of God in our words and actions.

Connecting the Gospel

to the first reading: The gospel and the first reading act almost as a call and response. The disciples of John go to Jesus and ask, "Are you the one who is to come, / or should we look for another?" In the first reading we find an answer to this question. The prophet Isaiah proclaims to the people in exile, "Here is your God, / he comes with vindication; / with divine recompense / he comes to save you." God's saving action can be seen in the flowers that bloom in the desert and in the healings of the blind, the lame, and the deaf.

to experience: In all things our God brings life from death, healing from illness, light from darkness. Often these saving actions can be missed when our focus is overwhelmed by the other realities of the world crowding in. Where do you see God's saving action taking place here and now in your own life?

Connecting the Responsorial Psalm

to the readings: Today's psalm gives us a litany of the Lord's saving actions that mirror closely the words of Jesus to John's disciples and the proclamation of the prophet Isaiah to the people of Israel: "Here is your God, / he comes with vindication; / with divine recompense / he comes to save you." The psalmist names God as the one who feeds the hungry, frees captives, protects the vulnerable, and in all ways, "raises up those who [are] bowed down." These are the markers of discernment that Jesus points to for John's disciples on their quest to discover if he is the one they have been waiting for. Jesus' saving actions reveal him to be the incarnate Son of the living God, who has been the champion of his people throughout history.

to psalmist preparation: This week, take time each evening to pause and consider where throughout the day you have encountered the saving action of God who "keeps faith forever."

PROMPTS FOR FAITH-SHARING

Looking at the world, your community, and your own life, where could you say, "Here is [our] God!" as the prophet Isaiah proclaims to the people of Israel?

The psalmist tells us, "The Lord gives sight to the blind." We look upon the world from our own perspective and sometimes this can blind us to the needs and concerns of others. Who is God wishing to open your eyes to?

The first words from today's second reading from the letter of St. James are "[b]e patient, brothers and sisters." When in your life have you been blessed through embracing patience?

The disciples of John the Baptist ask Jesus, "Are you the one who is to come, / or should we look for another?" In our culture, what do you think are the greatest temptations that lead us to turn our gaze from Christ and to search for fulfillment elsewhere?