

# JESUS' ADVENT ANTIDOTE TO DOUBT

The holy gospel for the third Sunday in Advent is taken from Matthew, chapter 11; verses 2-11.

<sup>2</sup>When John, who was in prison, heard about the deeds of the Messiah, he sent his disciples <sup>3</sup>to ask him, "Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?"

<sup>4</sup>Jesus replied, "Go back and report to John what you hear and see: <sup>5</sup>The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor. <sup>6</sup>Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me."

<sup>7</sup>As John's disciples were leaving, Jesus began to speak to the crowd about John: "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed swayed by the wind? <sup>8</sup>If not, what did you go out to see? A man dressed in fine clothes? No, those who wear fine clothes are in kings' palaces. <sup>9</sup>Then what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. <sup>10</sup>This is the one about whom it is written:

"I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you."

<sup>11</sup>Truly I tell you, among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet whoever is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

Dear fellow redeemed,

## JOHN'S DOUBTS

How could John doubt Jesus? He sent disciples to ask, "Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?" (Matthew 11:3) Jesus, are you the Messiah or not? How could he?

I mean, think of all the advantages John had. John grew up with Jesus. They were cousins. John poured the water over Jesus head at his baptism. He heard God the Father say, "This is my Son whom I love." He pointed at Jesus and said, "Look the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." (John 1:29) And John was Jesus' preacher. "The ax is already at the root of the tree." (Matthew 3:10) "His winnowing fork is in his hand and he will burn the chaff with unquenchable fire!" (Matthew 3:12) John knew Jesus would forgive sins and bring justice.

So how could he doubt? Well for one thing, he was in prison. When John preached about sin and repentance, not everyone loved it. The king had thrown him in jail to await execution. That's the kind of thing that makes a person doubt. "Am I really on the right team here?"

But more than that, John doubted because he heard what Jesus was doing. Jesus taught. Jesus healed. Jesus helped. But hearing of all the things Jesus was doing made John think of

everything Jesus wasn't doing.

"Jesus, where is the ax at the root of the tree? Where is the unquenchable fire? I could use a little justice right now! Unless... I was wrong." John wasn't wrong. Jesus will bring justice, but John didn't get to see it. Jesus will make his people safe, but John didn't get to see it see it.

How could John doubt Jesus? Of course, John doubted. He was a regular person and nothing worked out like he thought it would work out. "Is it possible that I'm wrong about all this?"

## CHRISTIAN'S DOUBTS

Maybe you've had an experience like that in a garden. Pick up a seed package with a picture of a big red tomato on it, and plant it in the ground. The package says "TOMATO." The picture shows a tomato. You burry the seed and water it. And then... nothing. Just dirt. Then maybe a little green sprig, and then some leaves. But not a tomato. It looks like maybe the package lied to you!

Now of course, you don't actually think that. You know how plants work. You've got to trust that under the ground, that seed is sprouting, and at the end of the summer you'll get what you're expecting. But for a little kid, who's never seen that before they might think. "It's not working!" They might ask, "Is that tomato ever going to show up?"

Maybe you've experienced that with Jesus. He promised, "**Never will I leave you. Never will I forsake you.**" (Hebrews 13:5) But it looks like it's not working. You might ask, "Is he really there?" He promised "**I am the resurrection and the life, whoever believes in me will live even though he dies.**" (John 11:25) But it looks like his promises is broken. Some of you have stood beside a casket, and you might wonder, "Is it true?" He said "**I know the plans I have for you, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you a hope and a future**" (Jeremiah 29:11). But when things in your life are out of control it looks like God either doesn't love you or can't help you. "Jesus, is your promise true?" Sometimes Jesus does not do what we expect. John doubted Jesus for the very same reason you doubt him.

## WHAT NOT TO DO ABOUT DOUBT

Which is why we can learn from John what to do about doubt. What would happen if John looked deep in his heart to calm his doubts, trusted his feelings? What if he decided to trust Jesus only if it were reasonable to him? What would happen if John decided to take a poll of popular people to get their opinion of Jesus? Your heart, your head, your world will never ever tell you the truth about Jesus. It will never tell you that he is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. If John looked here or here or out there for answers to his doubt, he would become an enemy of Jesus. He would be burning in hell right now! But he didn't.

Don't you look for the answers to your doubts in your journal or in your education or from popular opinion. Those may be fine things, but they will never ever tell you the truth about Jesus. They will never tell you that he is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

## JESUS' ADVENT ANTIDOTE TO DOUBT

John took his doubts to Jesus. And what happened? Jesus gave John the advent antidote to doubt. Jesus pointed John to all the things he had done. **"Jesus replied, "Go back and report to John what you hear and see: <sup>5</sup>The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor. <sup>6</sup>Blessed is anyone who does not fall away on account of me."**

"John don't you see? I'm doing the things the prophets predicted. I'm establishing my rule over sickness, my rule over sin, my rule over evil in this world." And it's not perfect, not yet.

John never saw justice on earth, he never saw Jesus burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire. But he did see Jesus. And what he saw scattered the doubt from his heart like a flood light scatters darkness. John saw Jesus and that made him the greatest person ever born—not because he was holy, but because he knew Jesus.

## JOHN WAS GREAT

Just imagine this. Moses was great but imagine someone coming to Moses with a heavy heart after committing some terrible sin. What would Moses say? "The Lord has taken away your sin. Let's kill a lamb in your place, so you remember that the Lord has spared your life". Great comfort, but there's a greater comfort. Imagine someone coming to John the Baptist with a heavy heart, overwhelmed by guilt. What would John say? "Look! Look at Jesus, the lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world." Moses knew about God's forgiveness through the offering of a lamb, but John knew the Lamb's name! John saw the lamb of God face to face! He was the Lamb's cousin! And Jesus said that's what makes John great. **"<sup>10</sup>This is the one about whom it is written: "I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you. <sup>11</sup>Truly I tell you, among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist."**

## YOU ARE GREATER

Do you remember what Jesus said next? **"Whoever is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he."** Let's imagine someone comes to you with a heavy heart after committing a grievous sin. What would you say? Not only do you know about God's forgiveness like Moses, not only

do you know the name of the Lamb of God like John the Baptist. But even the least among us know so much more about Jesus! You know greater truths than John the Baptist! You know that Jesus Christ lived a perfect life on this earth. You know that he was nailed to a cross even though he was innocent, which John never got to see! You know that his Father abandoned him on that cross, and you know that Jesus cried out, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" And you know why God forsook Jesus. so that he would never ever abandon you! You know that Jesus comes to wash away our sins in baptism, and in the Lord's Supper. You know that Jesus is coming soon to take us to heaven. You know all the best things about Jesus so that even 3 year olds are greater than the greatest prophet who ever lived.

John doubted when he thought of all the things Jesus wasn't doing. And Jesus Advent antidote to doubt was all the things he was doing. We doubt when we think of all the things Jesus isn't doing for us. And Jesus Advent antidote to doubt is all the things he is doing for us. During Advent we remember what Jesus did to scatter our doubts. During Advent we also remember that Jesus is coming again soon. When Jesus returns to judge the living and the dead he will bring the perfect justice John was looking for. You will be able to see him keep all his promises. Then, just like the tomato at the end of the summer, we'll get exactly what we've been expecting.

## JESUS' ADVENT ANTIDOTE TO NAZI PRISON

Maybe that's why Father Alfred Delp loved Advent. He wrote, "Never have I entered on Advent so vitally and intensely alert as I am now. When I pace my cell, up and down, three paces one way and three the other, an unknown fate in front of me, then the tidings of our Lord's coming to redeem the world and deliver it have quite a different and much more vivid meaning." It was the Advent of 1944. The cell was in Nazi prison. Alfred Delp wrote, "My mind keeps going back to the angel figurine someone gave me as a present during Advent two years ago. It bore the inscription, 'Be of good cheer. The Lord is near.' A bomb destroyed it. The same bomb killed the giver of the gift." If Father Delp looked at his world, his lost loved ones, his impending death, he had every reason to doubt Jesus. In fact, I'm sure at times he did! And that's why he loved Advent. "The Lord is near!" Father Delp was great, not because he was strong, not because he was holy, but because he knew Jesus. Jesus scattered the doubts from his heart.

When doubts creep into your heart—and they certainly will—remember what Jesus has done. He endured hell to be with you. Let there be no doubt that he is with you! He snatched you from the jaws of the devil. Let there be no doubt that he can snatch you out of whatever you're facing today if that's what's best. No matter what your doubt, go to Jesus! That's his Advent antidote to doubt.

Amen.