



December 14, 2025

The Third Sunday of Advent/*Gaudete* (Rejoice) Sunday

"And blessed is the one who takes no offense at me."

Matthew 11:6



Dear Friends,

Many times, in hearing confessions I ask myself what kind of God does this penitent believe in? How have they been shaped by a negative catechesis that promotes fear? They list things for which they feel the need for condemnation. I usually respond, *"It is good to identify the things that are wrong but that leaves us in a negative territory. It is difficult to change when only focused on the negative. Maybe we also have to think about what God is calling us to be? When we were made God said we're good. How are we letting that goodness be shown? That will effect a more positive change than only listing one's deficiencies."*

I generally give the same penance, *"God is love. The best way to love God back is to love yourself and your neighbor as much as God does. So, pick someone out this week that could use some love and compassion. Then do something nice for them"* Often that penance surprises them. But that is the heart of Reconciliation.

John appeared in the public arena as an apocalyptic preacher. He predicted the one to come would arrive with an axe in hand ready to chop down and burn the rotten wood of Israel. The fact that John was arrested was no surprise. His concern was not for his own life. He knew the risk he was taking when he spoke against Herod. His concern was for his mission and message after his death. In his prison cell John's disciples told him about Jesus. How Jesus was preaching with a welcoming and disarming message.

It is hard to imagine the faith crisis John was going through. Was Jesus really the one he had been called to announce? If so, where was the action? Where is the fire of righteous condemnation? John sends his disciples to ask Jesus to testify, *"Are you the one who is to come or should we look for another?"* Jesus avoids this question because it is too tied up with the conflicting definitions of Messiah. He turns the question back to them. Look at what you have seen. Judge for yourselves. What kind of activity shows the presence of God?

John was austere. No one questioned his integrity. Even if they looked forward to the apocalypse he predicted, few would want to live like John. His harsh lifestyle of fasting and abstinence reflected his concept of God. In contrast, Jesus was criticized for eating and drinking and mixing with all kinds of different people. That reflected his experience of God. That scandalized many. But he said, *"And blessed is the one who takes no offense at me."* No wonder John's primary sacrament was a penitential baptism, while Jesus' was a communion feast.

John recognized sin with great clarity, but Jesus was able to draw good news from his experience of God. Jesus gave witness with his actions. Wherever he encountered people, Jesus preached and demonstrated God's offer of salvation. The result was transformation, people restored to the fullness of their humanity in a community of love. Today we are asked to judge our faith in light of the message of Jesus. What are we hoping for? An apocalyptic punishment of evil and our enemies? Or do we long for the transformation of sinners, including ourselves?

Rejoice Sunday invites us to see the good around us. We are challenged to recognize God's work in every effort to promote freedom and communion. The more we actively share in Jesus' work of transforming the world, the more we will see that we have encountered *"God-with-us"* and we do not need to look for another. He is here.

Peace,

Fr Ron

Esta carta está en español en el sitio web: www.anne.church