

Third Sunday of Advent (C)

- Dec 12, 2021

Jesus is **totally unique**.

- He is not **just one more** exceptional teacher or philosopher, like Confucius, Buddha, or Socrates.
- Many great teachers and leaders have come and gone throughout human history, but there is **only one** Jesus Christ.
- This is the **crucial lesson** St John the Baptist is trying get across in today's Gospel.

And to do so he highlights **his own limitations**.

Later on in the Gospel, Jesus praised St John more than he praised any other person, calling him "**more** than a prophet... the **greatest** of those born of women."

So St John is in the **top drawer** of history's great human beings – we have Jesus' word for it.

But when St John compares himself to **Jesus**, what strikes us is the **vast difference** between them.

- St John claims he is not even worthy to be Jesus' **slave** (only slaves were given the task of taking off their masters' sandals).
- He points out that he can only "baptize with **water**."
- In other words, even the **greatest prophet in history** can only work with souls on a **natural** level.
- St John can strengthen them in **virtue** and help them **understand** the requirements of a good life.

But that **pales** in comparison with what **Jesus Christ** can do.

- In Jesus, the Messiah, who baptizes with "the Holy Spirit and with fire," we come into direct contact with **God himself**.
- And that doesn't just make us a **little bit better**; it can **completely transform** us, just as **fire** completely transforms whatever it burns
- This is why he is **the Messiah**, the "anointed one" sent to **fill the breach** that sin opened between God and man.
- No one **else** can be the Messiah, because no one else can bridge that **infinite** gap.

His coming into our midst is an utterly, totally, fantastically **unique** event.

St **Damien of Molokai**, recently canonized by Pope Benedict XVI (11 October 2009), illustrated this **unique love of Christ** in his own life.

- He was a Belgian missionary priest who volunteered to minister to a **leper colony** on an island near Hawaii.
- He spent **years** preaching, administering the sacraments, and reforming a corrupt and chaotic social environment.
- He brought the lepers **hope** for eternal life, and he also **reclaimed their dignity** as God's children in this earthly life.

One Sunday morning in June of 1885, he was celebrating Mass, as usual.

- He proclaimed the Gospel.
- The people sat down.
- Solemnly, he began his **homily** with the words, "**We lepers...**"
- The congregation went **completely silent**: with those words he had **informed** them that he himself had **finally** caught the **dreaded disease**.

St Damien, as do all the saints, reflects the **total, incomparable, self-sacrificing, redeeming** love of Jesus Christ.

We are the **lucky** ones; we **know** Jesus Christ, the Messiah, the utterly unique Savior of the world.

Maybe we don't always **follow** him quite as **faithfully** as we could, but we do follow him.

- We **worship** him at Mass;
- we **receive his grace** in Holy Communion;
- we receive his **forgiveness** in the sacrament of reconciliation;
- we are **protected** by living under the sign of his cross.

But what about all those people around us who **don't** know Jesus Christ?

What about our friends and colleagues, the poor and imprisoned, and maybe even our family members, who think Jesus is some kind of **myth** out of *The Da Vinci Code*?

- They don't know where to go to find **forgiveness** for their sins.
- They don't know how to **protect themselves** from temptation and the attacks of evil.
- They don't know where to find the **comfort, wisdom, strength, and hope** they yearn for.

And they will not **be here in two weeks** to welcome the Savior, **unless** a modern-day John the Baptist is **courageous and caring** enough to reach out to them before it's too late.

- When we were **baptized**, we became not only God's **children**, but also God's **messengers**.
- When we were **confirmed**, we **consciously accepted** the mission of being God's **ambassadors** in this dark and fallen world.
- There is no better time than the next two weeks to **redouble our efforts** at **accomplishing** that mission.
- God fills the air of Advent with **special graces**, but he needs **us** to be **channels** through which they can flow where they most **need** to: into hearts that are **far** from Jesus Christ.

As we continue with this Mass, let's **thank God** for the privilege of **knowing the Savior**, and let's ask him for the **wisdom and courage** to introduce (or re-introduce) him to someone who **doesn't** know him before this holy season ends.