

HOMILY – THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT “B” 12-17-17

“A man named John was sent from God ... to testify to the light. He was not the light but came to testify to the light.”

“The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me, he has sent me to bring glad tidings to the poor, to proclaim liberty to the captives and release to the prisoners.”

“Make straight the way of the Lord.”

These words heard in the readings for this third Sunday of Advent certainly should challenge us and remind us that as baptized Christians we have a mission. We have been anointed and we have been sent forth to testify and make straight the way of the Lord.

In a little over a week we will be celebrating the beautiful feast of the birth of Jesus – Christmas. Our church will be filled like no other day of the year. There will be families here who rarely, if ever, join us on Sundays throughout the year. I have often asked why that is. I think that part of the reason might be that there is no real challenge at Christmas. The worship space is beautifully decorated with lights and flowers. At the foot of the baptismal pool there is a nostalgic nativity scene. Darling little boys and girls reenact the events of that historical birth of Jesus that we remember at Christmas. Familiar Christmas carols are sung. In a real sense, we can sit back for a short time and be caught in the simplicity of a time long ago.

It is so much easier to be a spectator at the events surrounding the historical birth of Jesus. For so many well intentioned people, they come to Church to pay their respects to the new born child and then leave Jesus in the manger and go back to their daily routine. An authentic living of our baptismal vows should call us in a different direction. It calls us not to leave Jesus in the little town of Bethlehem, asleep in a straw bed, surrounded by his adoring parents, being serenaded by angels, but to bring him to our town, to our homes, and especially into our lives. It calls us not to keep him away in a manger, but to let him rule our hearts and fill our hearts with love, forgiveness and service.

Bringing Christ home is about building up the Kingdom of God. In the Gospel of Mark Jesus announced to all who would hear that his mission was to care for the poor, the oppressed, the imprisoned, to make a difference in the world, to set things right. This is the mission we were anointed for at our baptism.

Let me try and illustrate this point by referring to what many consider the first Christmas card sent in 1843 by a man named Sir Henry Cole, an Englishman. He commissioned a card that would express his greetings for the holidays. The first Christmas card was small, about three by five inches. But what was significant was its design. It was divided into three panels. The central panel showed a joyful family gathering around an abundant table. Underneath the scene was written: "A Merry Christmas and Happy New Year to you." But this central panel was framed by two other panels. On the left was a scene of the hungry being fed and on the right was a panel of the poor being clothed. The first Christmas card knew that Christmas was about taking Jesus into the world of the poor and suffering.

May the Spirit of God come upon us and may we bring light to those who live in poverty and darkness. May we be the men and women sent by God to bring glad tidings to the poor. May we work as committed followers of Christ to prepare the way to the Lord and make straight his path. We will come to adore the child Jesus on his birthday and we will carry his presence with us to bring light, hope and peace to the world.

Concluding Story

There was a man who took his 2-year-old daughter to do some shopping at a home improvement store and the little child was getting pretty restless. So he lifted her up on his shoulders and was walking around. As he walked, the little girl began pulling his hair and although he asked her to stop several times, she kept on doing it. Finally the father was getting quite annoyed at this and he said, "Madison, stop that."

"But daddy," she replied, "I'm just trying to get my bubble gum out of your hair."