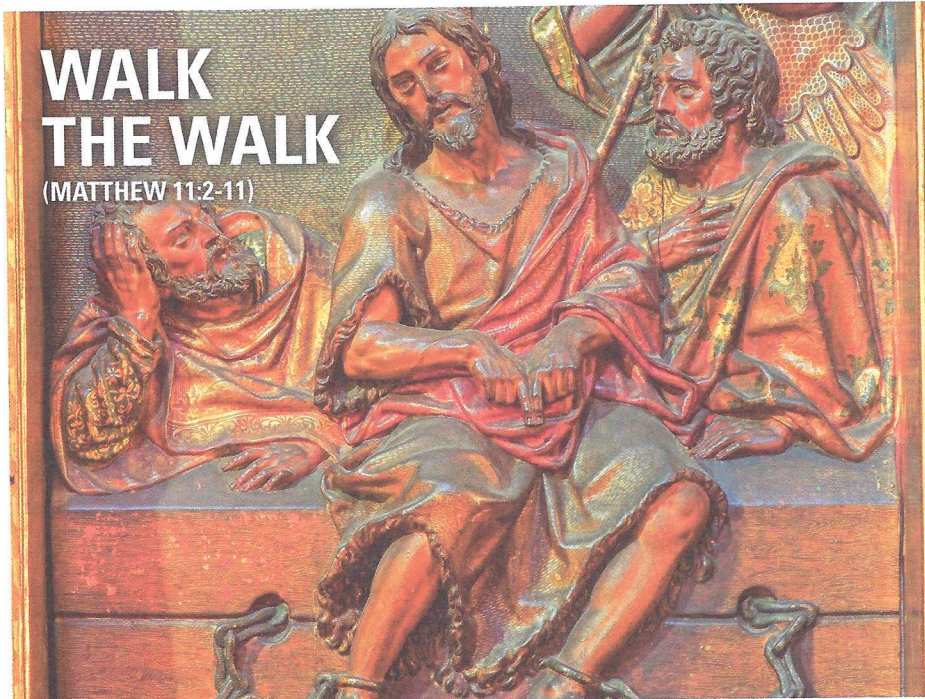


Sunday Message

THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

THE WORD

Year A • 11 December 2022 • Psalter Week 3



WALK THE WALK

(MATTHEW 11:2-11)

A depiction by Martinez Montanes of St John the Baptist in prison

John the Baptist had given testimony to Jesus at the river Jordan. He had declared that Christ was the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

Now, from prison, John sends his disciples to ask: "Are you the one who is to come, or do we have to wait for someone else?" The Baptist seems less sure about Jesus at this stage. Why the apparent hesitancy?

Different reasons have been suggested. One is that John asked the question not for his own sake but for that of his disciples. Or it could have been that John was puzzled because his own early message had been one of impending judgement: the axe was already laid to the root of the tree, the chaff was being separated from the wheat, the divine fire of cleansing judgement had already begun to burn – and this heavy emphasis on judgement was not coming through in the teaching of Jesus.

In his reply to John's disciples, Jesus says, in so many words: Don't report to John what I'm saying. Instead, tell him what I'm doing. Jesus' actions (restoring sight to blind people, life to the dead, preaching the good news to those who were poor) declared that he was indeed the Messiah, the Anointed One of God, whose coming John had announced.

The message would have made sense to John the Baptist because John had come in the spirit of the prophet Isaiah to prepare a way for the Lord. The reply Jesus gave to the Baptist was Isaiah's own description of what would happen when the Messiah came: blind people would see, those who were lame would walk, lepers would be cleansed, the dead would be raised to life, and the good news would be proclaimed to those who were poor. ■

LEARN

The Christian is one who follows the example of Jesus Christ.

Today is Gaudete Sunday, meaning "rejoice", from the first word of the entrance antiphon. We rejoice because our salvation is close at hand.

PRAY

To say we are people of faith is one thing; to show it is another. Ask the Lord for the strength to live the faith you profess every day.

DO

As you go about your Christmas shopping this week, be aware of those who are homeless or forced to beg. Extend the hand of friendship to them.

REFLECT

Hope seems in short supply at the end of this year. We're worried about the future. What kind of world are we leaving to our children? Despite all our advances in science and technology, despite how sophisticated we have become, despite the progress we have made in promoting human rights, our world seems as broken and unstable as in the past. War, inflation, racism, climate change, and political uncertainty are on the rise. The season of Advent cautions against despair. It assures us we are not alone. It urges us forward, knowing that, with God on our side, we need not be afraid. Hope will overcome.

Writer Roy Scranton has given his book about climate change a gloomy title. He's called it *We're Doomed, Now What?* But even though his analysis of the future sounds depressing, he refuses to let go of hope. He offers a good definition of hope. He links it with faith.

"For me, hope is always connected to faith because you don't hope that you'll go to work in the morning," Scranton said in an interview. "I don't hope I'll change my daughter's diaper, I just do those things. You hope for things that you don't have any control over. I do have a faith in human resilience and the human ability to adapt to difficult situations and still find ways to lead meaningful and rich lives."

Hope trusts in God's promises while working to build God's kingdom by putting the Sermon on the Mount into practice. Hope is about not looking away in the face of adversity but facing it head-on in the knowledge that God is with us.

That's what the season of Advent is all about. And that's what we need to focus on in the frantic build-up to Christmas day. What we celebrate this season is far more important than decorations, presents, and parties. This isn't a mere secular feast for us Christians, a handy excuse to eat and drink and max out our credit cards. This is the feast of hope, the feast of God-with-us, and it offers the timeless template for how we must approach all life's challenges. Even when things seem at their bleakest, hope still beckons us forward. ■

SAY

Say slowly and prayerfully the response to today's psalm: "Come, Lord, and save us."

ENTRANCE ANTIPHON

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I say, rejoice. Indeed, the Lord is near.

COLLECT

O God, who see how your people faithfully await the feast of the Lord's Nativity, enable us, we pray, to attain the joys of so great a salvation and to celebrate them always with solemn worship and glad rejoicing. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever. Amen.

FIRST READING

Isaiah 35:1-6, 10

A reading from the prophet Isaiah.

Let the wilderness and the dry-lands exult, let the wasteland rejoice and bloom, let it bring forth flowers like the jonquil, let it rejoice and sing for joy.

The glory of Lebanon is bestowed on it, the splendour of Carmel and Sharon; they shall see the glory of the Lord, the splendour of our God.

Strengthen all weary hands, steady all trembling knees and say to all faint hearts, "Courage! Do not be afraid.

"Look your God is coming, vengeance is coming, the retribution of God; he is coming to save you."

Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, the ears of the deaf unsealed, then the lame shall leap like a deer and the tongues of the dumb sing for joy, for those the Lord has ransomed shall return.

They will come to Zion shouting for joy, everlasting joy in their faces; joy and gladness will go with them and sorrow and lament be ended.

The word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

PSALM

Psalms 145

Response:

Come, Lord, and save us

or: Alleluia!

1. It is the Lord who keeps faith for ever, who is just to those who are oppressed. It is he who gives bread to the hungry, the Lord, who sets prisoners free. (R.)
2. It is the Lord who gives sight to the blind, who raises up those who are bowed down, the Lord, who protects the stranger and upholds the widow and orphan. (R.)
3. It is the Lord who loves the just but thwarts the path of the wicked. The Lord will reign for ever, Zion's God, from age to age. (R.)

SECOND READING

James 5:7-10

A reading from the letter of St James.

Be patient, brothers, until the Lord's coming. Think of a farmer: how patiently he waits for the precious fruit of the ground until it

has had the autumn rains and the spring rains! You too have to be patient; do not lose heart, because the Lord's coming will be soon. Do not make complaints against one another, brothers, so as not to be brought to judgement yourselves; the Judge is already to be seen waiting at the gates. For your example, brothers, in submitting with patience, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.

The word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Alleluia, alleluia!
The spirit of the Lord has been given to me. He has sent me to bring good news to the poor.
Alleluia!

GOSPEL

Matthew 11:2-11

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew.

John in his prison had heard what Christ was doing and he sent his disciples to ask him, "Are you the one who is to come, or have we got to wait for someone else?" Jesus answered, "Go back and tell John what you hear and see; the blind see again, and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised to life and the Good News is proclaimed to the poor; and happy is the man who does not lose faith in me."

As the messengers were leaving, Jesus began to talk to the people about John: "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed swaying in the breeze? No? Then what did you go out to see? A man wearing fine clothes? Oh no, those who wear fine clothes are to be found in palaces. Then what did you go out for? To see a prophet? Yes, I tell you, and much more than a prophet: he is the one of whom scripture says: Look, I am going to send my messenger before you; he will prepare your way before you. I tell you solemnly, of all the children born of women, a greater than John the Baptist has never been seen; yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he is."

The Gospel of the Lord. Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

PROFESSION OF FAITH

I believe in one God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible.

I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Only Begotten Son of God, born of the Father before all ages. God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father; through him all things were made. For us men and for our salvation he came down from heaven,

(all bow during the next three lines)

and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary, and became man.

For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate,

he suffered death and was buried, and rose again on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead and his kingdom will have no end.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son is adored and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets.

I believe in one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church. I confess one Baptism for the forgiveness of sins and I look forward to the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. Amen.

PRAYER OVER THE OFFERINGS

May the sacrifice of our worship, Lord, we pray, be offered to you unceasingly, to complete what was begun in sacred mystery and powerfully accomplish for us your saving work. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

COMMUNION ANTIPHON

Say to the faint of heart: Be strong and do not fear. Behold, our God will come, and he will save us.

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

We implore your mercy, Lord, that this divine sustenance may cleanse us of our faults and prepare us for the coming feasts. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

If the Word truly became flesh, then God had not only a mother, but also a grandmother, cousins, great-aunts, and weird uncles. If the Word truly dwelt among us, then he was part of a family that, like most, was fairly dysfunctional, a mix of the good and bad, the saintly and the sinful, the glorious and the not so glorious. And this is such good news for us.

Bishop Robert Barron