Jesu Juva

**Gaudete / The Third Sunday in Advent**

Text: St. Matthew 11:2-11

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Tell me… What is it you have come to church to see? A reed shaken by the wind? Perhaps you came to see a pastor who preaches and teaches *“feel good”* theology. Or perhaps you have come to hear your pastor tell you how Jesus wants you to raise your children, run a holy household, or live the holy life? Maybe your desire is for a savior who will tell you how to find success and prosperity. Perhaps you came to hear of a savior who will wink at your sins and confirm you in your transgressions; one who will make you feel good about yourself and the life you lead Monday through Saturday; one who will comfort and soothe your sinful conscience.

Did you come to learn of a savior who shifts with every blowing cultural wind and prevailing popular opinion—one who speaks out of both sides of his mouth? Did you come to learn of a savior whose only thought is to please you?

I pray not, for that kind of savior never challenges you, never rouses you from your sin, never cuts to the quick, never desires to truly comfort you or relieve your tormented soul. That kind of savior does nothing more than provide a *“quick fix,”* by anesthetizing your fickle emotions; he succeeds in nothing more than making you feel better about yourself. That kind of savior offers nothing more than what the world already grudgingly gives. That kind of savior is no more than a motivational speaker in priest’s clothing, and friends, that kind of a savior is no savior at all.

So, of whom or what did you come here to learn? I pray you came to learn of your **Savior**—a Savior who calls a simple man and vests him with His authority to preach to you His Word and His enduring mercy, who preaches Jesus Christ and Him crucified. For that, ultimately, is what matters most in this life, not that you are okay, or that things will get better, or that you simply have to believe harder. What is important in this life, and the next, is that the Lord Jesus died for you, that He loves you, accepts you, and has mercy on you despite your sin, despite your shame, and your guilt, and despite your self-righteousness and your persistent desire to have things your way.

For having things your own way, solving your own problems, determining when you are ready for God, demanding that everything be done from *your* perspective, based on *your* experience, and what *you* believe to be right, demanding that things be done to satisfy *you*, is precisely what St. John, the Baptist, preached against.

Those against whom St. John preaches, are like an airline passenger who demands to fly the airplane himself, without a shred of pilot training. Such a passenger will only end up killing himself *and all* who fly with him. Or they are like the cancer patient who not only tells his physician how his treatment will progress but also demands that *he* or *she* be allowed to cut out the cancer by performing surgery on themself. Such a patient will surely die on the operating table.

But if you think that is only the preaching of John the Baptist, you would be wrong. For that is the preaching *every* Christian pastor is called upon to proclaim. God works through His called and ordained ministers to bring to light things hidden in the darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts of men, that they may be brought to repentance and salvation—to give them that true and lasting peace, which the world promises but cannot deliver.

So, I submit, that St. John the Baptist is the icon of every faithful pastor. In the same way, Jesus used St. John, our Lord uses pastors to this day to continue to prepare His way. They are His messengers, who preach nothing more than His law to rend our hearts so that we would recognize our need for a Savior, and His Gospel, to mend our hearts and show us that Jesus is that Savior. Then, they are commanded to give to Christ’s people that very same Savior in the waters of Holy Baptism and the blessed Holy Supper of His crucified and resurrected Flesh and Blood.

Yet, for all this, pastors are no different from you; and you are no different from the disciples of St. John who were sent to ask Jesus, *“Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?”*

Yes, our questions are much the same, but they were not John’s questions. St. John may have been awaiting death as he sat rotting in a cold, damp, prison cell, but He who leapt in his mother’s womb at the sound of St. Mary’s voice and the presence of God who had taken up temporary residence in Mary’s womb had no doubts about this cousin of his. In speaking of his cousin Jesus, did he not boldly declare, *“Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.”*

No, John the Baptist did not doubt. Yet, there *was* doubt to be overcome. St. John’s disciples had heard his preaching, but did they understand? Even Jesus’ disciples did not understand their Master’s preaching until the day of Pentecost. No, there was no doubt on John’s part; Jesus’ answer to the question his disciples were to ask was for their benefit—and ours.

So, we too ask, *“Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?”* AndourJesus’ answer is wonderful.

*“The blind see and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up and the poor have the Gospel preached to them. And blessed is he who is not offended because of Me.”*

This is not just Jesus’ answer to the query of John’s disciples; it is an answer for you, me, and all mankind. It is an answer that is as true now as in the days when our Lord Jesus walked here among us preaching, teaching, and healing. It is the answer Jesus always gives.

It is the answer Jesus gives to you now and to all who are laid low, all those who feel unworthy, all the weak and the stumbling, all those who feel they have no hope, and all those who feel like they have nowhere to turn. Jesus is the answer, and He gives of Himself to all those whom John has cut down with His axe; He is the answer to the brood of vipers, and the hypocrites. Jesus is the answer even for you when you try to make your own way, when you are arrogant enough to believe that the Church should revolve around what you believe, not what the Church has always preached, taught, confessed, and practiced.

Jesus comes *“for us men and for our salvation.”* Jesus comes to suffer and die, and take up His life again for you. He comes to help and comfort you in all things. He does this by washing you in the waters of Holy Baptism and feeding your faith on the Medicine of Immortality, giving to you His Body and Blood to eat and to drink. He comes to you bringing His gentle Word of absolution.

I pray that is what you come to church to see, hear, and receive, not the confirmation of your self-righteous goodness, and your feigned conviction and commitment, and not some sort of psychobabble theology that plays to your emotions and all the while ignores your immortal soul.

Blessed are those who are not offended because of Jesus. Blessed are those who do not demand more, who are not disappointed; blessed are those who do not say, *“That is all fine and good Jesus, but this is what I believe.”*

Jesus gives you the best of Himself. In fact, He gives you Himself, even His own life, fully and completely. I pray you receive Him, not as *you* think He should come, not as *you* believe He should be, but as He truly is. And may you welcome and rejoice in the salvation He gives you here in this place, in His Divine Service, and wherever you might hear His Holy Word spoken in all its power and truth, and His Holy Sacraments are rightly administered. For then you are among the blessed who hear His Word and keep it.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

 Soli Deo Gloria

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