

THE SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT

(Mt. 11:2-10) *(Audio Year A Track 005)*

(Poem Vol. 2, pp. 701-6 – Gospel Vol. 4, pp. 287-93; Azariah (1993) pp. 221-2 – (2007) pp. 230-1)

(During the second year of His public life, three men come to Capernaum to visit Jesus. One of these is His disciple Manaen, who is a servant of King Herod.)

Jesus says: “Peace to you, Manaen! So you have remembered Me?”

“Always, Master. And I had planned to come to see You in Lazarus' house or at the Garden of Gethsemane, and stay with You. But the Baptist was captured before Passover. He was recaptured by treachery, and I was afraid that Herodias might order the holy man to be killed during the absence of Herod, who had come to Jerusalem for Passover. She refused to go to Zion for the Festivity, saying that she was not well. It is true, she was ill... of hatred and lust... I was at Machaerus where John is, to control the situation, and to check this wicked woman who is capable of killing with her own hand... But she does not do so, because she is afraid of losing Herod's favour. Herod is either afraid, or he is convinced. And he defends John, confining his action to keeping him in prison. Herodias has now escaped from the oppressing heat at Machaerus, and she has gone to a castle of her own property. So I came with these two friends of mine who are disciples of John. He sent them, so that they may ask You some questions. And I joined them.”

When the crowd hear the man speak of Herod, and they understand who is speaking, they press curiously round the little group - of Jesus and the three men.

“What did you want to ask Me?” asks Jesus after exchanging greetings with the two austere personages.

“You had better speak, Manaen, since you know everything, and you are more friendly” says one of the two.

“Well, Master. You must be indulgent if, out of excess of love, these disciples look suspiciously at Him whom they believe to be the antagonist, or one who takes the place of their master. Your disciples do this, as well as John's. It is an understandable jealousy that proves all the love of the disciples for their masters... I am... impartial, and these who are with me can confirm this. Because I know You, and John and I love you - both with justice. So much so, that although I love You for what You are, I preferred to sacrifice myself and stay with John, because I respect him as well for what he is, and - at the present moment - because he is in greater danger than You are. Now, because of these men's love - which the Pharisees are instigating with their hatred - they have come to doubt that You are the Messiah. And they told John, thinking that they would fill him with joy, saying: ‘As far as we are concerned you are the Messiah. There cannot be anyone holier than you are’. But John reproached them, first calling them blasphemers, and then, after rebuking them, he more kindly explained the various facts that prove that You are the true Messiah. Finally, when he realised that they were still not convinced, he took two of them - these ones here - and said: ‘Go to Him, and say to Him in my name: “Are You the One Who is to come, or shall we wait for another one?” ‘. He did not send the shepherd disciples, because they believe, and it would have been of no avail to send them. But he chose two of those who are doubtful, to let them approach You, so that their word may dispel the doubts of their companions. I brought them here, so that I could see You as well. That is all. I beg You to dispel their doubt.”

One of the two men says: “But do not think that we are hostile to You, Master! Manaen's words might make You think so. We... We have known the Baptist for

years, and we have always seen him to be holy, penitent, inspired. You... we know You only through the words of other people. And You know what the words of man are worth... They build up and destroy fame... like those who exalt, and those who demolish, as a cloud is formed, and dissolved by contrasting winds."

"I know," says Jesus. "I read your souls. And your eyes can read the truth in what surrounds you, just as your ears heard My previous conversation with the widow. That should be enough to convince you. But I say to you: look at those who are around Me. There are no rich, or jolly, or scandalous people here; but only poor, sick, honest Israelites, who are anxious to know the Word of God. Nothing else. This man, that one, this woman, and that little girl, that old man - they were ill when they came here. And now they are sound and healthy. Ask them, and they will tell you what was wrong with them, how I cured them, and how they are feeling now. Do so. And in the meantime, I will speak to Manaen" and Jesus is about to withdraw.

"No, Master" says one of the men. "We do not doubt Your words. Just give us a reply to take back to John, so that he may know that we came here. And on the strength of it, he may convince our companions."

And Jesus says: "Go and report this to John: 'The deaf hear; this girl was deaf and dumb. The dumb speak; and that man was dumb since his birth. The blind see'. Man, come here. Tell these men what was wrong with you." And Jesus takes a miraculously cured man by the arm.

The man says: "I am a mason, and a pail full of quicklime fell on my face. It burnt my eyes. I was four years in the dark. The Messiah wetted my dry eyes with His saliva, and they have become fresher than when I was twenty years old. May He be blessed for it."

Jesus resumes: "And with the blind, the deaf, and the dumb who have been cured - the lame walk straight, and the cripples run. Over there is that old man: a short while ago, he was bent over, now he is as straight as a palm tree in the desert, and as agile as a gazelle. The most serious diseases are cured. Woman, what was the matter with you?"

"I had trouble with my breast for giving too much milk to ravenous mouths. And my illness ate not only into my breast, but also into my life. Look now" and opening her dress she shows her wholesome breasts. And she adds: "They were one big sore, as you can see from my tunic which is still soaked with pus. I am now going home to put on a clean dress, and I feel strong and am happy. Whilst only yesterday I was dying. I was brought here by compassionate friends, and I was so unhappy... because of my children, who were about to be left motherless. Eternal praise to the Saviour!"

"Do you hear?" asks Jesus. "You can ask the head of the synagogue of this town with regard to the resurrection of his daughter. And on your way back to Jericho, go to Naim, and ask for the young man who rose again in the presence of the whole town, when they were going to put him into his grave. You will therefore be able to report: that dead people rise again from the dead. You will be able to find out in many places in Israel, that a large number of lepers have been cured; if you wish to go to Sicaminon, you will find many among the disciples, if you look for them. Tell John, therefore, that lepers are cleansed. Tell him, as you can see, that the Gospel is announced to the poor. And blessed are those who will not be scandalised in Me. Tell John that. And tell him that I bless him with all My love."

"Thank You, Master. Bless us as well, before our departure."

"You cannot leave in this warm hour." says Jesus.

“Stay here, therefore, as My guests, until evening. You will [thus] live - for one day - the life of this Master who is not John, but who loves John. Because I know who he is. Come into the house. It is cool and it will restore you.

Goodbye, My listeners. Peace be with you” and after dismissing the crowd, Jesus enters the house with the three guests...

... What they have said to one another during those sweltering hours, I do not know. What I now see is the preparation for the departure to Jericho of the two disciples. (Manaen is apparently staying...) The two messengers of John, after bowing several times to the Master and to Manaen, mount their donkeys, and look back, saluting, until they disappear round a comer...

(Afterwards, many of the people from Capernaum and other places want to talk with Jesus. One says:)

“...Ah! they can say what they like, but as far as I am concerned, no one is holy but You!”

“But John is holy, too.” says a man of Bethsaida.

“Yes. But he is too severe.”

“No more with others than he is with himself.”

“But he does not work miracles, and they say that he fasts to be like a magician.”

“And yet he is a saint!” And the petty quarrel spreads among the crowd.

Jesus raises His hand, stretching it out in His usual gesture while asking for silence and attention, when He wants to speak. The crowd becomes silent at once.

Jesus says: “John is holy and great. Do not consider his way of behaving or the lack of miracles. I solemnly tell you: He is a great one in the Kingdom of God. He will appear there in all his grandeur. Many complain that he was (and still is) so severe as to appear rude. I tell you solemnly, that he has worked like a giant to prepare the ways of the Lord. And he who works like that has no time for softness. Did he not repeat, when he was along the Jordan, the words of Isaiah, by which he and the Messiah are prophesied:

‘Let every valley be filled in, every mountain and hill be laid low, let every cliff become a plain, and the ridges a valley.’

[Wasn't this] in order to prepare the ways to the Lord and King? He really did more than the whole of Israel, to prepare My way! And he who has to lay mountains low, and fill in valleys, and straighten roads, and make ridges become plains - can but work rudely. Because he was the Precursor, he preceded Me by only a few months. And everything was to be done before the Sun was high on the day of Redemption. This is the time: the Sun is rising to shine on Zion and thence on the whole world. John has prepared the way, as he had to do.

What did you go to see in the wilderness? A reed swaying in every direction in the breeze? What did you go to see? A man clad in fine soft clothes? But those live in the palaces of kings, wearing fine clothes, and respected by many servants and courtiers - and they are courtiers themselves of a poor man. There is one of these courtiers here. Ask him whether he is not disgusted with the life at Court, and whether he admires the solitary rugged rock: that is struck in vain by thunderbolts, and scourged by hailstones; against which, silly winds struggle, endeavouring to demolish it; while it stands firm, thrusting its whole being towards the sky, with its top proclaiming the joy of altitude; straight as it is, and sharp like a rising flame.

That is John. That is how Manaen sees him, because he has understood the truth of life and death, and he can see grandeur where it really is, even if it be hidden under a wild appearance.

And what did you see in John when you went to see him? A prophet? A saint? I will tell you: He is more than a prophet. He is more than many saints. Because he is the one of whom it is written: 'Look, I am going to send my angel to prepare Your way before You'. An angel. Consider this. You know that the angels are pure spirits, created by God to His spiritual likeness, and placed as a link: between man, the perfection of the visible and material creation; and God, the Perfection of Heaven and Earth, Creator of the spiritual Kingdom and of the animal kingdom. Even in the holiest man, there is always flesh and blood, forming an abyss between him and God. And the abyss subsides under the weight of sin, that also weighs down what is spiritual in man.

God created the angels, creatures reaching the summit of the creation scale (just as minerals lie at its base, minerals being the dust, forming the earth and inorganic materials in general.) The angels are clear mirrors of the Thought of God. They are willing flames, operating out of love, ready to understand, quick in acting, free in willing as we are. But their entirely holy will ignores the rebellion and incentive of sin. That is what the angels adoring God are, His messengers to men, our protectors. They grant us the Light that shines on them, and the Fire that they gather when worshipping.

John is called 'angel' by the prophetic word. And I say to you: Of all the children born of women, a greater one than John the Baptist has never been seen. Yet the least in the Kingdom of Heaven will be greater than John the man. And one, of the Kingdom of Heaven, is a son of God and not of woman. Endeavour therefore to become citizens of the Kingdom..."

(Azariah, Maria's Guardian Angel, says:)

"...Do you remember John the Baptist? What is the praise Jesus utters of his Forerunner? It is this: 'What did you go out to see in the desert? A reed shaken by the wind?'

John, the Precursor, was a not a reed, shaken left and right by the wind, and broken by a child's hand or a passing animal. He was strong to the point of violence: that violence by which the Kingdom of Heaven is defended and conquered. John, the Forerunner of Christianity, had to be this force which nothing cracks and knocks down. Otherwise, how could he have prepared the ways of the Lord - if he had been a weak man whom just anyone could have cast aside?...

Pray, Christians, pray that no more than a third will fall, swept away: by Satan; by his seven accursed heads; by the tenfold infernal weapons; and by his serpentine, diabolical work.

Pray, pray that the organism of the believers, the Church Militant, will remain the 'Rock', and not become mud, lime, mortar, or brick.

Raise up around her, the shield of your prayer, for the hour is really tremendous: more tremendous than the hour of darkness in which Christ was immolated...

In this hour, long and ever darker, the Satanic world - which is rising up against you Christians, against the Church - is faced only by men... [by] mortal human nature which (without the aid of God) succumbs. And the more it is already infected and softened by the fumes of the world and the science of the world, the more it succumbs.

Pray, indicating to the Father the mystical Head of the Church, so that out of respect for the Face of his Christ, the Most High will intervene to impede the affronts He already suffered on Good Friday...

And pray with merit, pray as just men - that is, as the Blessed Paul says, '[those who] walk according to the spirit,' not satisfying the desires of the flesh.

The select part is the spirit. Give precedence to the spirit; give it regality. The flesh is the handmaid; the spirit is the king...
