

The Second Sunday of Advent A: December 4, 2022
St. John the Baptist, the “voice of one crying out in the desert...”

Perhaps you can still see in your mind's eye the picture of all of the people rushing into the stores on Black Friday some years ago – actually, I've been given to understand that the stores, due to our economy, didn't do so well. Many of those 'one day sales' are still going on. Lots of commotion; lots of noise! With this in mind I am reminded of one of the lines from the Psalms. In this Psalm, we hear the author crying out to God to save both His people and His Temple from a violent nation:

"Arise, O God, and defend Your cause! Remember how the senseless revile You all the day. Do not forget the clamour of Your foes, the daily, increasing uproar of Your foes." (Ps. 74. 22-23)

As I explained in last week's homily, it's not that I am against Christmas shopping, and it's certainly not that I am against finding bargains... but, if we devote all of our time to shopping and bargains, wearing ourselves out in the process – especially in the midst of all of that noise and din – shall we truly be ready for the real reason for Christmas when it comes upon us again this year?

In looking at our Gospel passage from St. Matthew today, it seems that there was some other kind of noise and excitement going on for the people then. What excitement was that? Very simply... the person of St. John the Baptist and, even more deeply than his presence, a deep sense in the heart of the people that something, rather, *Someone!*, was not only on the way, but, even then, already *among them!*

It was of St. John that Isaiah – six hundred years previously – had spoken: *"A voice of one crying out in the desert, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight His paths."* The Fathers of the Church are quite clear about this point, and so is the Apostle St. John: John the Baptist is the Voice – Jesus, Whom John announces – is the Word: *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."* (St. John 1. 1)

Notice, I said that the people had a deep sense that *Someone* was already among them. This deep sense, this longing, is the whole meaning of Advent, as our Holy Father Emeritus, Benedict, points out in a homily he wrote many years ago. Writing as Cardinal Ratzinger, His Eminence points out:

*"‘Advent’ does not... mean ‘expectation,’ as some may think. It is a translation of the Greek word *parousia* which means ‘presence’ or, more accurately, ‘arrival,’ i.e., the beginning of a presence. In antiquity the word was a technical term for the presence of a king or ruler and also of the god being worshipped, who bestows his *parousia* on his devotees for a time. ‘Advent,’ then, means a presence begun, the presence being of God. Advent reminds us, therefore, of two things: first, that God’s presence in the world has already begun, that he is present though in a hidden manner; second, that his presence has only *begun* and is not yet full and complete, that it is in a state of becoming and progressing toward its full form. His presence has already begun, and we, the faithful, are the ones through whom he wishes to be present in the world. Through our faith, hope, and love he wants his light to shine over and over again in the night of the world.”* (1)

As usual, Cardinal Ratzinger's thought is deep, penetrating, leaving us astonished, requiring time to be digested, thought through.

The Baptist preaches repentance. As Sheen reminds us: "The first note of warning in the New Testament tells all men to change. The Sadducees must lay aside their worldliness, the Pharisees their hypocrisy and self-righteousness; all

who come to Christ must repent.” (2) And, as Archbishop Sheen so beautifully points out:

John considered himself unworthy to untie the shoes of Our Lord, but Our Lord would surpass him in humility as He would wash the feet of the Apostles. The greatness of John consisted in the fact that to him was given the privilege of running before the chariot of the King and saying, ‘Christ has come.’ (3)

You may be wondering where I am leading by wandering from Cardinal Ratzinger to Archbishop Sheen. There is a method to my madness. Both men remind us that Advent is that time of life which proclaims – *not!* Christ is coming – but, though in a hidden way – *Christ is among us – we are waiting for Him, we are awaiting His birthday*, and as Ratzinger points out, *we are awaiting*, albeit somewhat impatiently, *His even greater presence among us in glory.*

But right now His presence among us is very quiet. His presence is Eucharistic. And His presence is in the hearts and loving actions of His believers. *The voice that cries out in the wilderness is sometimes hard to hear over the loudspeakers in the check-out lanes, sometimes even in our homes with our overly-crowded schedules.* Perhaps the greatest gift we could give the Infant Child, and all the ones we love this Christmas would be to simplify, to slow down, to quiet down, so that we might hear that “*still, small voice*” of the Lord? (cf. 1 Kings 19. 12)

This week on Wednesday we shall be celebrating the feast day of the last Greek Doctor of the early Church, St. John Damascene (+ c. 787). Let me leave you with a little bit of his work *The Statement of Faith*:

Lord, You loved us and sent Your own Only-begotten Son for our redemption. Willingly and without hesitation He undertook that work. Even more than that, he was designated for sacrifice as an innocent lamb because He offered himself for that. Though He was God, He became man and by His human will He humbled Himself and became obedient to You, God the Father, unto death, even death on a cross. (4)

Give us, during this Advent, the grace of the loving, trusting, brave yet quiet obediential love of Your Son.

1. Josef Cardinal Ratzinger, *Dogma and Preaching*, Franciscan Herald Press, 1987, pgs. 71-72
2. Fulton J. Sheen, *Life of Christ*, McGraw-Hill Book Publishing Co., Inc., New York, 1958, pg. 52
3. Ibid., pg. 53
4. Office of Matins, Feast of St. John Damascene