

ADVENT 3 A 07

How often have you admonished some one with the words; BE PATIENT!

At this time of the year it is the Y 12 student waiting for the results to come out,
Or the little child desperately counting the number of sleeps until Santa comes,
Or it might be the lonely person waiting for it to be all over and back in the past,
Or for those who just want to get over the fuss and life to get back to normal, or the shopper at the long line at the cash register.

Then there are those anti religious types who resent the intrusion of overt displays of religion, and then there are the pious who just hate the hijacking of a significant religious occasion by crass commercialism.

BE PATIENT!

Saint James counsels us to BE PATIENT!

It is sound advice.

Christmas ought to be well prepared for; it is after all, one of our greatest celebrations.

John 1:14-15 (NRSV)

14 And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.[1] <#_ftn1>

Or as John discloses with the record of the words of Jesus:

John 3:16 (NRSV)

16 "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

So we should be shouting the Good News from the housetops, the rest of the activities that surround Christmas should simply take their appropriate place behind this central celebration.

John the Baptist was waiting the fulfillment promised by Isaiah. He had baptized Jesus and proclaimed him to be the Messiah. And again the evangelist John records this powerful witness:

John 1:29-34 (NRSV)

29 The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him and declared, "Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! 30 This is he of whom I said, 'After me comes a man who ranks ahead of me because he was before me.' 31 I myself did not know him; but I came baptizing with water for this reason, that he might be revealed to Israel." 32 And John testified, "I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. 33 I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' 34 And I myself have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God."

What stronger affirmation could be made?

Yet in today's passage from Matthew we have John wondering:
Matthew 11:3 (NRSV)

3 and said to him, "Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?"

Has his patience run out?, what has happened to John who has been so fearless and unwavering in his testimony?

Remember, John is now languishing in prison. And Herod's gaol would be no 5 star resort, it would be a stinking, dirty and dark hole – a place where all one's fears and doubts would rapidly bubble to the surface.

John wonders, "have I got it all wrong?"

Some of John's disciples go to Jesus to get an answer for their troubled master: And Jesus gives the answer that John needs to hear: Matthew 11:4-6 (NRSV)

4 Jesus answered them, "Go and tell John what you hear and see:
5 the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them. 6 And blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me."

This answer would assure John that Jesus was indeed the "one who was to come" because in the answer the promise of God, given through the prophet Isaiah is now being fulfilled before their very eyes.

And this incident reminds us that even the great figures of the Bible, and those we call saints can wrestle with uncertainty. The other great example in the N.T. is Thomas – who would not believe the news of the resurrection until he actually saw and touched Jesus.

Many of the great spiritual writers speak of times of struggle with doubt. You may have read of reports recently in the media about Mother Teresa of Calcutta who in some of her letters expressed her doubts about the very existence of God.

And today many people pose the question as to whether God exists or not. You would recall the furor around Richard Dawkins book, *The God Delusion*. Atheism is getting a good run at the present time; but that is not surprising when you consider the enormous influence of religious fundamentalism evident in our contemporary world. Couple that with the violence and suffering we witness is it little wonder good people of faith have, at times, doubts.

Be Patient! , calls James, and he could well add: hang on to your faith, for the Lord will Come: as we will shortly proclaim: "CHRIST HAS DIED, CHRIST IS RISEN, CHRIST WILL COME AGAIN."

Jesus reassures John by saying: “look at me, what do you see?”

With John we are invited to look at Jesus: in whom we see the love of God made real in human form: the Lord is truly present.

Our doubts are washed away as we look to Jesus: we don't need arguments, proofs - we see in Jesus the one who is the “Christ” because 5 “the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them”

With this assurance we embrace Christmas – not as a one day celebration, but as an event that can transform our lives, so that we are also “good news”; and as we wait patiently for the Lord to “come again” we exercise Jesus ministry to all, but especially to the poor and marginalized.

[1] <#_ftnref1> The Holy Bible : New Revised Standard Version. 1996, c1989. Thomas Nelson: Nashville