

Advent III
12/11/2022

A BICYCLE BUILT FOR TWO

Last week we heard of John the Baptist and his call to repentance. Despite being not only different but rather scary, St. John the Baptist was a man of great courage. A week ago, Pope Francis described him as a man with an allergy—he had an allergy to duplicity as he told the Pharisees and Sadducees to give evidence of their repentance.

This week we find John the Baptist in prison. How did he get from the Jordan River into prison? Perhaps because of another allergy. You could also say that John the Baptist had an allergy to injustice and he called people out on it, even the powerful, even if it required great courage. He condemned Herod for his illicit marriage—marrying his brother’s wife, while that brother was still alive. Because he called out Herod for this injustice, for this sin, and ultimately, all sin is a type of injustice, John landed in prison. John the Baptist would die defending truth and more specifically, die defending the truth about marriage.

There’s so much you don’t have in prison, your freedom, control of your diet, your company, your movement and more. Your life is governed by the decisions of other people. But in most cases, there’s something you have and that is time, a lot of time. Time to think, time to wonder, time to question and perhaps even time to doubt yourself and doubt others.

Last week John spoke of a messiah who would baptize with fire and the Holy Spirit; who would separate wheat and chaff burning the chaff. That doesn’t seem to be happening, at least not yet. It never says John doubted but at the least, he asked a question some other people can ask. He sent two of disciples to ask Jesus, *Are you the one who is to come or should we look for another?*

The Jesus John proclaimed seems different, where’s the Kingdom? Jesus’ answer has to do with the blind seeing, the lame walking, the dead being raised and the good news being preached to the poor. These are signs of the kingdom of God; something that Isaiah the Prophet spoke of over 700 years before Jesus. Jesus’ answer is yes, but his yes differed from what John expected. He adds, *Blessed is the one who takes no offense at me;* in other words, Don’t lose faith because I’m

different from what you expected. Now in time, like John, Jesus will share some very challenging words.

Perhaps John had one idea of what Jesus should be doing and Jesus had another. Jesus didn't seem to conform with John's expectations. And it doesn't stop with John. Sometimes, even without being in prison, we can start to wonder and to reevaluate ourselves and others. We can all have our own expectations of who Jesus is and what he should be doing.

To be a disciple, is to be a student and as followers of Jesus, we're all students from the most recently baptized baby to the oldest cloistered nun, to the pope, we're all disciples. The Church has been described as a community of disciples, even a communion of disciples. As disciples we seek to conform ourselves to Jesus rather than try to conform him to ourselves and who we think he should be. That's a lifelong task and Jesus can be full of surprises, as we walk the road of discipleship with lives of intentional faith. We can think he should do it one way and he does it another way.

Here's an image: Think of a bicycle built for two. To be a disciple is to let Jesus be in front both pedaling and steering. Your job in the back is simply to pedal, at times a lot and at times perhaps to enjoy the ride. To walk in faith, is to let Jesus drive and for us to pedal.

In the second reading, St. James explains of what this discipleship can look like. It involves being patient and to be patient literally means to suffer. It also means waiting. We think of being patient as being patient with other people and that's certainly the case. But we also have to be patient with ourselves. That's doesn't mean excusing ourselves but rather realizing that we're finite creatures but as disciples of Jesus, we have a goal that's infinite. At the same time, we have to be patient with God and his timing, his wisdom, his surprises.

He goes on to give some very sound advice, Do not complain. Now this doesn't mean tolerating the intolerable and we all need a pressure valve from time to time to let off steam. But chances are that many of us complain too much. *It's so cold outside.* Well, no one can change the weather. *You know what the government needs to do?* Well, tell your elected officials. Think what life would be like if we could reduce our complaining just by fifty percent.

As we continue to journey through this Advent season, preparing for Christ's coming, strengthened by the grace of true repentance, nourished by worthily sharing in the Eucharist, may we mold ourselves around Jesus rather than trying to mold Jesus around us, not taking offense at him and his way of doing things. May our eyes always be open to the signs of the kingdom. May we be patient with others, ourselves and with God and may that patience strengthen our hearts more and lead us to complain less. On the bicycle of life, may we pedal and let Jesus lead, let Jesus drive.