

# ALL SAINTS

## CATHOLIC CHURCH & SCHOOL



*Love God • Serve Others • Form Disciples*

**December 6 & December 7, 2025;  
Third Sunday of Advent (Gaudete Sunday)**

## *Father Eric's Homily*

### **FRAILTIES AND STRENGTHS**

**Isaiah 35:1-6, 10; James 5:7-10; Matthew 11:2-11**

John the Baptist was a precursor of Jesus. Right from the start of Jesus' ministry he recognized him as the Messiah, the awaited One (John 1:29-34; Matt. 3:13-17; John 3:28-30). However, in today's Gospel passage, we read that while in prison, John began to doubt Jesus' identity as the Christ and sent his disciples to ask him whether he was the One (the Messiah) who was to come or they should wait for someone else.

Some scholars have proposed that John asked the question not for his own sake but for the sake of his disciples. It has been suggested that while John was in prison, his disciples questioned him whether Jesus was indeed the one who was to come, and John sent them to go to Jesus to inquire by and for themselves if they had doubts. However, it is clear from the passage that it was John himself who had doubts. His doubts might have stemmed from the fact that Jesus had not met his expectations as the Messiah. John's message was one of doom. He expected the Messiah to do terrible things to the unrighteous. In the Gospel reading of last Sunday, for instance, he talked about "coming retribution", and indicated that the axe was laid to the roots of the trees, to cut down trees which failed to produce good fruits and throw them into fire. He also mentioned that the Messiah would gather his wheat into the barn and burn the chaff in a fire that will never go out. These expectations of John about the Messiah may apply to his second coming but not to his first coming. John therefore had an incomplete view about the Messiah. He might have been impatient and expected the Messiah to bring about the destruction of the unrighteous just like Jonah expected God to destroy the people of Nineveh.

Jesus, instead of doing what John expected of him, went about mingling with sinners and eating with them. He sought to win sinners to his kingdom with love, not with threat of destruction. This attitude of Jesus made John begin to have doubts whether he was really the expected Messiah. Sometimes, some of us like John the Baptist, can have our own expectations, base on which we want God to act or expect things to happen. There are some Christians who desire and expect God to punish and destroy the wicked. Sometimes, we can take offence at Jesus because he acts contrary to our expectations. However, as he told John and his disciples, and as he tells us today, "blessed is the one who takes no offence at me". We must keep in mind that God's thoughts are not our thoughts, and our ways are not his ways (cf. Isaiah 55:8).

Matthew, by writing about John's doubts, wanted to indicate that men of God also have their frailties. Just like John, we also have our weaknesses irrespective of how dedicated we are in the service of God. The most important thing is not to take any offence at Jesus and to try our possible best to work on our weaknesses. Jesus' response to John's disciples was to tell John what they could hear and see. He said: "The blind regain their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have the good news proclaimed to them". These are signs of the Messianic era foretold by Isaiah which we find in today's first reading. Jesus by alluding to these signs reminded the disciples of John that the works he was performing were signs given by Isaiah as signs of the messianic era. Thus, for Jesus, his deeds speak for him as the One who was to come.

After addressing the doubts of John, Jesus began to praise him; he paid a great tribute to him. He began by indicating what John was not, through parallel questions. By indicating that John was not a reed swayed by wind, Jesus meant that John was not a morally weak person who could be swayed away by human authority or public opinion. John never feared human authority. He never softened the truth for any one; he fearlessly denounced evil whenever and wherever he found one. It is for this reason that Jesus contrasted him with reeds by the river side which could easily be swayed by wind. Again, unlike some false prophets who lived luxurious lifestyle in palaces and prophesied to suit their kings, Jesus indicated that John was nothing of that sort. The question we must ask ourselves here is, can our conduct and what we stand for win us praise from Jesus? If Jesus were to speak about us, will he pay a tribute to us just like he did to John? If our way of life cannot elicit praise from Jesus now, it is about time we examined our life and began to change some of our principles and attitudes. There is no better time to do this than now, in this period of advent, as we prepare ourselves for the coming of Christ.

For Jesus, there had been no greater prophet than John the Baptist until his time. The greatness of John has to do with his role rather than his personality. What made him the greatest among all the preceding prophets was because he was the immediate herald of the Messiah; he had the privilege of introducing the Messiah. His greatness therefore derives from the greatness of Jesus. This notwithstanding, Jesus points out that the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than John. Jesus by such words does not intend to belittle John but rather to highlight the greatness of the kingdom of heaven and by extension of his own greatness as the Messiah. John is a kind of a "dividing line" between the old era and the new era. He belonged to the time of preparation whereas Jesus' disciples (those in the kingdom) belong to the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of heaven was present in Jesus himself. So, the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than John not because the disciples of Christ (Christians) are more devout than John or work harder than John but because those in the kingdom have and proclaim fuller message of the kingdom, a message more than John and those beforehand proclaimed. We should feel privileged and blessed to belong to this kingdom. We must do our possible best to keep our membership in this kingdom.

