

3rd Sunday in Advent

Matthew 11:2-11

Submitted by Dr. Rosemary Murphy

Unless we are hearing an uplifting homily, praying with a Gospel passage, or reading an inspiring article, few of us think of the Incarnation. On days filled with personal and professional obligations and the routine tasks of daily life, the Incarnate, the all- pervasive presence of God in human existence, may seem very remote.

Today's Gospel from Matthew beautifully illustrates our bond with the Christ who broke through time and space to save us. He came to heal us, to introduce us to the good news, and to bless us with eternal life when we accept the invitation to be a disciple.

From prison, John the Baptist sends his followers to Jesus with the question: "Are you the one or should we look for someone else?" (Matt 11: 3) Given the fact that John (who, in the presence of Mary, leapt for joy in Elizabeth's womb) and Jesus were cousins and given the fact that John baptized Jesus in the river Jordan, the question seems odd. Surely John knew who Jesus was. Why would he ask that question?

However, if we think for a moment about John's mission to witness to Jesus as "the Christ," the Messiah, then the question becomes an opportunity for Jesus to illustrate how he is the Messiah. Rather than answer the question directly, Jesus tells John's disciples to report back what they have seen and heard. The work of the Messiah and the work of the disciple is to:

Heal: disciples are to work for restoration, wholeness, harmony in all they do and with all people they encounter.

Evangelize: by example, by life-style, by witness and by words, disciples are to preach the good news of Jesus Christ.

Take no offense, accept Jesus as God's beloved Son come to save us: here the Incarnation intersects with the life of the disciple. The Incarnation, present in every moment of our lives, begins with faith. It is supported by the graces needed be fully human and it is strengthened every time we act out of love to serve the Lord.

Today's Gospel ends with Jesus' tribute to his cousin. John the Baptist fulfilled his role. In preparing the way for the Messiah there was no greater prophet. However, John's work is finished and now the work of discipleship falls to us. And, Jesus promises, remarkably, that even the least of our intentions and actions to heal, evangelize, and to accept the Savior will be recognized in the kingdom of heaven. God is always with us making the plentitude of our human effort possible.