

Alleluia, alleluia!

The spirit of the Lord is upon me;
he sent me to bring Good News to the poor.
Alleluia!

GOSPEL

Mt 11:2-11

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew.

Are you the one who is to come, or must we wait for someone else?

John in his prison had heard what Christ was doing and he sent his disciples to ask him, 'Are you the one who is to come, or have we got to wait for someone else?' Jesus answered, 'Go back and tell John what you hear and see; the blind see again, and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised to life and the Good News is proclaimed to the poor; and happy is the man who does not lose faith in me.'

As the messengers were leaving, Jesus began to talk to the people about John: 'What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed swaying in the breeze? No? Then what did you go out to see? A man wearing fine clothes? Oh no, those who wear fine clothes are to be found in palaces. Then what did you go out for? To see a prophet? Yes, I tell you, and much more than a prophet: he is the one of whom scripture says: Look, I am going to send my messenger before you; he will prepare your way before you. I tell you solemnly, of all the children born of women, a greater than John the Baptist has never been seen; yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he is.'

■ The Gospel of the Lord.

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Reflections on the Gospel



THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT / A

15 DECEMBER 2019

THE KINGDOM OF GOD: ALREADY, BUT NOT YET

In response to the question put to him by John the Baptist's disciples, Jesus points to a great variety of miraculous deeds that he has performed. From this they—and John—should be able to conclude that he was the long-awaited Messiah, performing the deeds that Isaiah foretold.

We may well think that this was all very good for the few thousands of afflicted people who accessed Jesus' healing power during his lifetime. But where does that leave the vast mass of the afflicted down the centuries to our own day?

Some kind of answer may lie in the 'already-not yet' aspect of the Kingdom of God proclaimed by Jesus. It has *dawned* in his first coming but is by no means fully arrived. That must await his second coming. We proclaim this in our Creed, expressing the hope that God's sovereignty in the universe will one day be complete.

In the meantime, the miracles remain a 'beachhead' of the kingdom to give us hope. They teach us to see the afflicted *not* as punished by God (an all too prevalent error) but as people particularly apt to receive and become instruments of God's power.

The same goes for the poor: the Good News that is 'preached' to them is of a piece with the first Beatitude proclaimed by Jesus at the beginning of his great Sermon (Matthew 5-7). The poor are 'blessed', not precisely in their poverty, but because God has adopted their cause and one day will see that it prevails.

Brendan Byrne, SJ

FIRST READING

Isa 35:1-6, 10

A reading from the prophet Isaiah

God himself will come and save us.

Let the wilderness and the dry-lands exult,
let the wasteland rejoice and bloom,
let it bring forth flowers like the jonquil,
let it rejoice and sing for joy.

The glory of Lebanon is bestowed on it,
the splendour of Carmel and Sharon;
they shall see the glory of the Lord,
the splendour of our God.

Strengthen all weary hands,
steady all trembling knees
and say to all faint hearts,
'Courage! Do not be afraid.

'Look your God is coming,
vengeance is coming,
the retribution of God;
he is coming to save you.'

Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened,
the ears of the deaf unsealed,
then the lame shall leap like a deer
and the tongues of the dumb sing for joy,
for those the Lord has ransomed shall return.

They will come to Zion shouting for joy,
everlasting joy in their faces;
joy and gladness will go with them
and sorrow and lament be ended.

■ The word of the Lord.

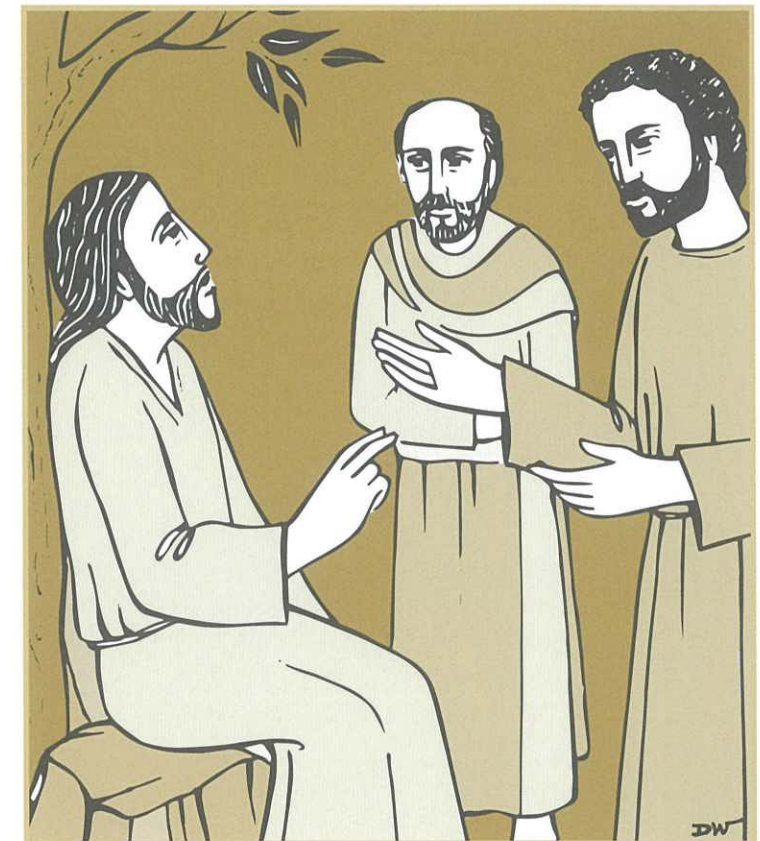
RESP PSALM

Ps 145:6-10. R. cf. Isa 35:4

R. Lord, come and save us. (or Alleluia!)

1. It is the Lord who keeps faith for ever, /
who is just to those who are oppressed. / It is
he who gives bread to the hungry, / the Lord,
who sets prisoners free. **R.**

2. It is the Lord who gives sight to the blind, /
who raises up those who are bowed down, /
the Lord, who protects the stranger / and
upholds the widow and orphan. **R.**



3. It is the Lord who loves the just / but
thwarts the path of the wicked. / The Lord
will reign for ever, / Zion's God, from age to
age. **R.**

SECOND READING

James 5:7-10

A reading from the letter of St James

*You also must be patient; do not lose heart, the
Lord's coming will be soon.*

Be patient, brothers, until the Lord's coming. Think of a farmer: how patiently he waits for the precious fruit of the ground until it has had the autumn rains and the spring rains! You too have to be patient; do not lose heart, because the Lord's coming will be soon. Do not make complaints against one another, brothers, so as not to be brought to judgement yourselves; the Judge is already to be seen waiting at the gates. For your example, brothers, in submitting with patience, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.

■ The word of the Lord.