

Third Sunday of Advent

Preaching for Retirement

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

December 12, 2004

Homily by S. Catherine Marie Bazar, OP

I love John the Baptist! I especially love to meditate on that trying time John spent in prison, wondering where he went wrong, did he follow the wrong crowd, was his energy for what he thought was right the very thing that turned against him? If ever there was a test of a man's faith, it was this darkest of all hours for John!

And to top it off, it wasn't even Jesus who went to him to offer encouragement. "Go," Jesus said to others, "tell John the result of all his labors and efforts. For what he spent his life proclaiming will now come about." Typically, a prophet's role is NEVER to see the results of a lifetime of service.

could John finally accept that all he had given to the world was in the name of another, Jesus, and he was not to share in that? Jesus does it all! John merely voiced it, and then disappeared from sight!

Today I want to speak of others who, like John, gave their lives for the Gospel truth, people we no longer see or hear about. These are our retired religious who also are confined and waiting. However, I am always impressed at the "buzz" surrounding our Sisters in retirement whose active lives seemingly have ended. Like John, they cannot go back, yet in their waiting, so many of them, having spent their lives in service, seem to put themselves on automatic pilot. Ex: My first grade teacher, Sr. Gabriel, now 90, spends her time polishing the shoes of our infirm Sisters and washing their habits and veils out of respect – when she isn't tutoring Vietnamese seminarians in English. When Sr. Alberta was in her mid nineties, she gave up active life and spent her time visiting and praying with the bedridden sisters who had once been her students in school. When she was in her 80's, Sr. Rosalia got permission to live alone in a small apartment among Oakland's poorest people so that she could be their voice in welfare offices, emergency rooms, and city hall.

When I visit our bedridden sisters in our care center or some of my priest friends in convalescent homes, I am always struck by two things: they have nothing more to say. It's as if all has been said and done, and there is only the long, dark advent of waiting. The second is a very pointed question they like to ask: "What are you doing with your life right now? I'll pray for you."

This statement is, as it were, the passing on of a precious legacy to present religious. It's as if they want to say, "you are entrusted with the treasure of the Gospel! Live it even when your energy is gone." And also, "Someday you will pass it on when your long and final Advent is upon you."

Our retired men and women often wonder if they have made any difference at all, but they have tried to live out their own prophetic call. How? By pointing the way, as John did, to the person

of Jesus and His power to transform all things. If ever our world needs this transformation, it is today in the living of the evangelical vows:

Poverty, the gift of a shared life in a culture that accumulates, hoards, and ignores the poor and vulnerable. Chastity, the gift of shared, unconditional love in a culture that exploits men, women, and children for selfish gain.

Obedience, the gift of responsible living that reverences the environment and all peoples in the face of war, pollution, and waste.

Today is the 17th annual collection for the retirement fund for religious. Through your generosity, this collection will help to offset the many needs that our aging brothers, priests, and sisters require. Their social security benefits average a little less than \$4,000 annually, in contrast to the general population of almost \$11,000.

This has also been by far the most successful fundraiser in the history of the church in the U.S. How good it is that all these years many of you have said about our “advent” religious who may wonder if anyone remembers them: “Go and tell them what you have seen and heard in the parishes from those of us who remember and support them with such love.” By this, their time of waiting will be eased, and your needs and cares will be absorbed into their constant greeting, “I’m praying for you!”

We ask, too, that you pray FOR OUR YOUTH, THAT THEY WILL RESPOND to the CALL OF THE CHURCH, THAT THEY WILL not be afraid to listen to God’s language of silence in their deep hearts. This language calls out for more voices to be heard in the spiritual wilderness of our world. PRAY THAT others will respond, like John, to preparing the way of the Lord for the future THAT IS yet to come.